

DISCIPLESHIP

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The text

This edition is based on the texts of Mr North's books which first appeared on the website of Lanark Christian Fellowship many years ago.

We have exercised as much care as possible in the conversion into this format, but if you are aware of any errors, could you please let us know.

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Discipleship

The word disciple simply means 'learner' and could be used of many persons in connection with many things. Because of its nature however, its use is generally confined to particular fields of learning rather than to general spheres of subjects of education open to any pupil or scholar. This is readily seen when considering children and school, or students and college; no-one is thought to be or expected to become a disciple of his or her teacher or lecturer just because he or she is imparting knowledge. There is far more involved in discipleship than the mere absorption of knowledge; a disciple must be a copyist, he must learn with the intent of reproduction — the reproduction in his own life of the life of the teacher. He is sore concerned with taking his teacher as an

example, someone upon whom he can model his life, than just as a mere teacher, an imparter of knowledge.

There are those to whom the acquisition of knowledge is a lifetime ambition; they seem to have 'itching ears' and are for ever learning without coming to the knowledge of truth. The Athenians were renowned examples of this; they lived entirely for the pursuit of new things. Mars Hill was a famous seat of learning and the Areopagites were considered to be great and learned men, but they rejected the gospel and Christ. Possibly many of them were disciples of contemporary philosophers, certainly they developed many ideas among them and founded famous schools of thought and many of them lived accordingly. It is said of them that they taught the world to think, but that is a gratuitous assumption; if it be

true it is nothing but mechanics and 'know-how'. They were undoubtedly teachers, but they have no disciples for they are dead.

While they were alive they had disciples, but they do not have any now, for it is not possible to be a disciple of a dead person.

While the Lord. Jesus was on earth He made many disciples; He did so quite deliberately and when He was about to leave the earth He gave His disciples clear instructions to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, 'teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you'. He was very definite: discipling was to continue. If He had left it there we might have concluded that He intended them to think they should disciple men to themselves, but the Lord did not give that commandment until after He was risen from the dead and then went on to say, 'and lo I am with you all the days

even unto the end of the age', so it becomes obvious that He meant men to be disciplined to Himself; this is possible because He is alive. What He is saying is, 'I am with you every day to make disciples'.

The order of truth revealed here is very simple: make disciples, teach them. These men who heard Him speak that day on Olivet would have understood exactly what He meant, for that is exactly how it had happened with them; first He made them His disciples and then He taught them. The Lord's method of making them His disciples was very simple: He came where they were and called them: 'Follow Me', He said and they followed Him. Not all of them did so immediately; Matthew did, he rose, left all and followed Him and as far as we know he never looked back. Others including Peter only followed Him spasmodically at the

beginning; they seemed to find it a struggle to leave all and follow Him and to do it all at once. Eventually however, many, like Peter, made the final break and followed Him in the same spirit as that apostle, who once declared, 'Lord why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake'. Such was the attachment and devotion of those men to Jesus that they all attested their own personal allegiance to Him; His leadership and example and teaching won them completely.

The words, 'we have left all and followed thee', aptly sum up the human concept of true discipleship. They were uttered by Peter as a direct result of witnessing the coming and going of the rich young ruler. This man suddenly appears on the sacred page, rushing to Jesus and falling on his knees before Him, driven by a sense of need that

neither breeding nor position nor wealth nor religion could abate or satisfy. 'Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?' It sounded such a noble thing for a ruler to do — a nobleman kneeling before a peasant; all might easily have been deceived by it, so Jesus dealt with it and with him summarily. 'Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven and come take up the cross and follow me'. He answered him in that vein because He loved him; the Greek word used by Mark carries the thought of to esteem, to sum or weigh up. In other words Jesus fully estimated him; He esteemed him for what he was, and also dealt with his esteem for Him and his estimations of eternal life.

Although he did not say so, it seems that this wealthy and highly religious young man

wanted eternal life without becoming a disciple. Obviously he did not wish to follow the Lord, at least not on His terms (and it is impossible for anyone to follow the Lord on his own terms) so he left Him. It was tragic; the Lord was as much grieved as the young man and said 'how hardly shall they that have riches enter the kingdom of heaven; it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven'. 'Come take up the cross and follow me'. Eternal life and discipleship and the cross cannot be separated; they are placed together by the Lord because they inhere in each other; whether a man sells all or leaves all, as the case may be, makes no difference — he must follow the Lord at all costs.

It cannot be otherwise, for the Lord Himself did exactly that. He left all to come to earth.

He who was the richest young ruler of all was born a comparatively poor man on earth and lived like that all His life. He left all to become a lamb, a follower of His Father's will and wishes, until He was finally led to the slaughter. He never made any demands on man which He Himself had not previously fulfilled. He did not make idle demands on people, but simply told the truth and revealed the facts. He once said 'if any man come to me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me'. Some of the conditions He laid down for discipleship are exacting in the extreme; they may be gleaned from His sayings by anyone who cares to read the Gospels with this intention; here is a selection of the further ideas and truth He openly stated about it:

The disciple must hate and renounce his own life and never again seek it in this

world, he must also deny himself and unreservedly hate his blood relatives; before he commences the venture he must sit down and count the cost because the course must be finished. To one man He as good as said, 'You will not have so much as a hole to go to or a nest in which to lie down; a fox or a bird may well expect to be better off than a disciple of mine. I must be first in all things, let the dead bury the dead and let the gospel be your greatest concern. Put your hand to the plough, never look back, keep yourself fit for the kingdom of God'.

With these and other words like them Jesus uncompromisingly set high the standard of discipleship which has never been lowered by Him since. The compensations and rewards for obedience are enormous, far outweighing any loss sustained in this life while achieving them; the demands are not

lessened by them, rather are they strengthened thereby.

1. On the Banks of Jordan

Another thing the Lord clearly stated which, although not as yet mentioned here, must also be frankly considered by the would-be disciple, it is baptism in water. He considered that to be baptised by John Baptist was another step toward the fulfilment of all righteousness for Him, so He was publicly immersed in Jordan and for His obedience earned the commendation 'Thou art my beloved son in whom I am well-pleased'. He expected all His disciples to be baptised, and authorised His apostles to apply the rite to all their converts, 'baptising them in to the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost'. All disciples must face up to the implications of baptism — death to and burial away from the world, the flesh, the devil and sin and self. It is a fitting beginning

to the life of discipleship, a sign of self-renunciation and utter devotion and of a life swallowed up by God as completely as the grave swallows the dead. Jesus, the anointed Son of God, came through water baptism; it was most important to Him and should be considered of equal importance by every other person who wishes to show by discipleship that he is a son of God.

The word disciple is a general noun implying that the person bearing it has accepted a discipline and by doing so has declared that he no longer wishes to live a life of self-pleasing, but has chosen instead to become a follower and learner of Christ. From that moment he has become a devotee, utterly committed to Him and to His cause. That is how Christ sees it and so did persons like Paul, who suffered the loss of all things and counted them dung and loss so that he may

win Christ. He only lived to press toward the mark', forgetting the things that were behind him. This man considered himself to have been bought entirely by God, that he was no longer his own and was in fact a slave, a bond slave of Christ; in other words a true disciple. There came a time in his life when he determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified; from then on he knew himself to be debtor to Christ and to all men for his life and service. He seemed to have understanding of things right from the beginning, for at his first meeting with Christ he acknowledged Him to be the Lord and called Him that.

If ever there was a true disciple of Jesus Christ it was the apostle Paul, yet as far as the records go he never once used the word disciple of himself or of any other. This may be thought more than a little surprising, but

to all who have made his acquaintance through his writings it is seen to be typical of the man. His impact on his age and especially on the Church was profound; he was dynamic. Specially raised up of God, his effect upon the apostles themselves was incalculable and his legacy to the churches, particularly those he established, is his epistles, each one of which is absolutely invaluable to us. What influence he had among his peers in the ministry and on the canonical writers — both apostolic and non-apostolic — cannot be fully estimated. Perhaps we may assess some of his power from the fact that, following the Acts of the Apostles, indeed long before it runs its course, the word disciple altogether disappears from the sacred page and presumably from the vocabulary of the early church. This is a remarkable phenomenon

indeed, for preceding this it had appeared hundreds of times in the New Testament and once in the Old Testament. It is not an Old Testament word in that it does not bear the same meaning in Isaiah as in the Gospels. It was introduced first in connection with John Baptist. Men apparently gathered themselves unto him, accepted his ministry of baptism, learned of him and fondly attached themselves to him, thus becoming known as his disciples.

It was not an unusual thing in Jesus' day for men to say they were Moses' disciples, though nowhere in scripture do we find the children of Israel described in that way. It was therefore quite natural that men should be called disciples if they followed a man or adhered to his teachings and practised his commandments. Gamaliel, a man of great reputation in Jesus' day, draws attention of

the Jews to two men in Palestine who had risen up about that time and had attracted people to themselves, pointing out that the movements came to nought because the leaders were slain and there was no-one to follow. Discipleship was popular among fanatical people then and Jesus was well aware of that fact. He therefore, upon occasion, took steps to disenchant people from popular ideas and to discourage fanaticism, lest men and women should become self-deceived and bring discredit to the gospel He came to bring. Perhaps it is for this same reason that Paul and all the other contributors to the New Testament following the Acts utterly refrained from using the word disciple.

Peter addresses himself to the strangers, James writes to the tribes, John pens his second letter to the beloved lady and his

third to Gaius, while Paul sends his epistles to the churches. It is chiefly in these letters of Paul that we find the new name for Christians which has substituted the word disciple in scripture, namely saints. To men of understanding it is easy to see how and why the substitution was made, for this word came in with the revelation of the Church which is the body of Christ. This is the reason why it is Paul who introduces the name into the New Testament, for it was mainly to him that the truth of the body of Christ was revealed. He saw the fullest implications of this truth. The body of Christ is holy, the most sacred body on earth and reason would that if a person has been baptised into that body, he or she being a member of that body is a holy person, a saint.

Paul was never a follower of Jesus of Nazareth in the flesh and he saw quite clearly the vast difference between being a disciple following a person and a member belonging to that person's body; it is very important that we also see it. Discipleship and sainthood are not the same. They are not to be regarded as two conflicting ideals though, but as two concepts of spiritual life. A person is not expected to cease to be one in order to be the other and it is necessary for each one of us to understand this. As we shall see there were many in Christ's day who only became temporary disciples and followed Him for a while; they did not leave all to follow Him as did others, but went back. These never went on to sainthood; that is to say they did not utterly commit themselves to the Lord and persevere until they were baptised into His body and made

holy people. It is an amazing fact that, with the exception of one reference which is to people of the old covenant, the word saint does not appear in the Gospels. It first comes into use in the Acts of the Apostles; from then onwards it occurs frequently in the writings of the New Testament, chiefly those of Paul and John. In fact Paul addresses his Ephesian letter to the saints and faithful ones in Christ Jesus there.

We see then that the Lord Jesus deliberately refrained from calling people saints, choosing instead to call them disciples, while Paul did exactly the opposite, calling them saints and brethren instead of disciples. This is most significant and indicates a complete change of thought involving new concepts of spiritual life. It would seem that the Lord could not honestly call His followers saints, but named them for what they were,

learners only. Experientially they did not then belong to His body. Of the eleven, who for a while followed Him from the supper room en route for Gethsemane and Golgotha, He said they were given Him by His Father. A little earlier He had told them that they were His friends, and in conversation with Mary Magdalene after He rose from the dead He called them His brethren, but never once did He say they were saints. The simple reason for this is that until they were born again they were not holy ones, nor could be until He had died and risen again and had baptised them in the Spirit into His body. Believers they were and disciples, some were even called apostles, but not saints until this great change took place in them.

This was the whole point of His calling and their discipleship. They were called to take

up the cross daily and follow Him faithfully all the way. Very few did. In fact in the end only Mary His mother and John His disciple stood by Him on the cross; all the others forsook Him when it came to that. Perhaps none of them knew that the whole point of His calling and leadership was to the cross, and perhaps few today realise that discipleship is to this same end. By the plain implications of scripture discipleship is unto sainthood, and except sainthood (that is a life of holiness) be reached discipleship is in vain. Because of old Jesus called someone, or did something miraculous for someone, or people heard of or saw something wonderful happening to someone, many thousands became followers of Him, at least for a while, but mostly it was because of outward phenomena. Few had anything

sufficiently real to keep them going to the end toward which He was moving.

This was the great tragedy of discipleship in His day and He knew it; let it be sufficient warning to us in these days of specious over-indoctrination on the subject of discipleship. The unwarrantable emphasis being laid by modern men on this aspect of truth is dangerous inasmuch as it gives undue importance to organisation, elevating authoritative men and women to positions for which they are not fitted and which Christ never intended. Nevertheless, despite the tendency to overlook fuller truth, there is much for all to learn by the emphasis — we must obey scripture and buy the truth, determined never to sell it at any price for any reason.

All four Gospel writers have much to say about the disciples of Christ. At least three

of the authors actually knew Him after the flesh and followed Him and two of them, John and Matthew, were chosen apostles and loved Him dearly. One of John's favourite expressions when speaking of himself in relationship to Jesus was the disciple whom Jesus loved'. Perhaps he was the unnamed one of the first two men who followed the Lord from His first public appearance at Jordan; if so he called Him Rabbi — Master or Teacher from the beginning. If this is indeed true John was a close observer of Him from His earliest ministerial appearance to His last moments on earth. It is perhaps not surprising then that he should be chosen to make such a vast contribution to the New Testament. His input into the scriptures — a Gospel, three epistles and the Revelation — was unequalled by any of his contemporaries;

not even Paul equalled him, even though numerically his works exceed those of the Senior apostle. It is therefore probably most significant that, in common with Paul, John should drop the word disciple from all of his writings except his Gospel. But true though that is, his references to discipleship and Jesus' teachings about it are so momentous that to miss or ignore them would be calamitous.

Some of the remarks and teachings he has recorded are so frankly uncomplimentary to the chosen disciples, including himself, that he cannot be thought anything other than a most honest and self-effacing man, most concerned that we should know the truth. He was not new to discipleship when he met Jesus. For some time before that John Baptist had been making disciples and John had been

baptised by him in Jordan; he was most probably a disciple of his namesake before he became a disciple of Jesus. He was entrusted by God with the task of recording the beginnings of things in a very individual way. He commenced his Gospel with the words 'In the beginning', and in keeping with that records the glimmerings of the beginnings of discipleship which perhaps lay as yet undiscovered in the hearts of the two who stood listening to John Baptist by Jordan that day when he said 'Behold the lamb of God'. At the time Jesus was walking with purpose near the river in which He had been baptised the previous day. Hearing their master's words, John's two disciples followed Jesus, who, seeing them following, said to them, 'What seek ye? They said unto Him, Master where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and

saw where He dwelt and abode with Him that day'.

They did not then know what lay in His heart for them, or all that true discipleship meant. Their ideas of discipleship were different from His. They thought it was a desultory affair of intermittent comings and goings for longer or shorter periods, for at the beginning they came and went. We cannot be sure, but perhaps that was how they had responded to John Baptist also; they had not left all and gone to him, they had never been expected to do so, but had given him as much time as was consistent with their beliefs and convenient to them. They therefore did not know that the Lord Jesus, being who He was, would demand utmost commitment from them. They were convinced from the beginning that He was the Christ and said so to others, but had no

idea that ere long He would be claiming their whole attention. It seems that once they had accepted John Baptist as their teacher and had been baptised by him, their concept of spiritual living had been to go out to him as opportunity presented itself and listen and learn and then retire home again. Peter is an outstanding example of this kind of thinking.

2. By the Galilean Lake.

This man, who was later to become a leading apostle, was first brought to Jesus by his brother Andrew, who asserted to him that he had found the Messiah. That first meeting was momentous and left him speechless, 'Thou art Simon the son of Jona', said Jesus, 'thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone'. What a beginning! Who was this who at the first introduction made so bold as to change a man's name? Why and what was it all about? What effect this had on Peter is difficult to tell; he certainly did not regard it as a call to discipleship, but went back home to his wife and his fishing business — undoubtedly with very mixed feelings and thoughts. However, Jesus had designs on him other than that, so following His

temptation in the wilderness Jesus went after him. He found him with his brother, fishing in Galilee, 'follow me and I will make you fishers of men' He said and they straightway left their nets and followed Him. How long they stayed with Him or how far they followed Him then we are not told; we do know though that they did not continue with Him, for later we find Him back at the lake again seeking them; they had gone back. Why they went back is left to the imagination, we only know that this time the call was conclusive, they forsook all and followed Him and never went back.

At last the message had reached them. Until now they had not been prepared to forsake everything. They had responded to His charm and felt the pull of His attraction, but had not been ready to let go of everyone and everything else for His sake; their own

business and home ties came first. But at last they realised there was much more to being a disciple of Jesus than just going to visit Him occasionally, or having Him visit them for long or brief spells as the case may be. Beside this, Peter at least had reached a place of desperation because of his sin. How long the conviction of his sinfulness had been growing in him is impossible to tell; maybe it had been growing in him over the days since John Baptist had first pronounced Jesus to be the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Or maybe it was the presence of Jesus with him in the boat — the sheer righteousness and purity of Him. Or it may have been the fact that he had been and still was trying to elude the Lord and His claims on his life — perhaps it was all three, we do not know; all we know is that he felt he was a sinner and

told Jesus to go away and leave him alone. They were tense moments of struggle, but Jesus won him and at last Peter and those with him abandoned fishing and home and became lifelong disciples.

John does not record any of this in his Gospel, nor does he mention the details of the successive callings of any of the disciples, neither does he show how the Lord elevated some of them, including himself, to apostleship and commissioned others to a less intimate position and ministry. John leaves that to his fellow-writers; he turns his pen instead to the task of recording other details relating to the development of everyone's spiritual life and calling rather than to original calls.

Comparing his Gospel with Matthew's for instance reveals an illuminative detail, namely this: Jesus already had disciples

before He specifically called anyone to follow Him. What is more important John also records the vital conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in Jerusalem at the Passover when the Lord so emphatically stated, 'Ye must be born from above'. It was not until after that and possibly also following His trip to Samaria that the Lord commenced calling men to discipleship. Before that it seems He was content to win men by attraction rather than by direct challenge and call.

Until this time all the people had been attracted to John Baptist and being converted by his gospel had become his disciples, but being pointed by him to Jesus, many of them, if not most of them, had been converted to Jesus. We see then that discipleship was at that time determined by allegiance to a person and acceptance of his

leadership and teaching. John Baptist was a great light shining and burning in the wilderness, therefore he attracted multitudes to himself, but Jesus came into the world a far greater and more fiery light than His forerunner and, as we may expect, made and baptised more disciples than John. Significantly enough the Lord Himself did not practise water baptism; His disciples did it for Him, and, presumably in His name, disciple baptised disciple; perhaps that is an indication of the great numbers who turned from John to Jesus wishing to become His followers. This was perfectly acceptable to John and Jesus, but before the Lord went out to call men to Himself He firmly established at least one thing, namely this, that in order to enter the kingdom of God a man must be born of water and of the Spirit.

It is not sufficient that men should be baptised in water only; everyone must be baptised in Spirit as well. Water baptism is an external thing, though it should never be done except upon correct inward convictions; it can only ever be a symbolic act. When a man is baptised in water he is only as it were born into a new life. When John baptised a person, from that moment onwards he or she was regarded as his disciple; all sins were at that moment forgiven by God and John became his new teacher and scripture-interpreter; from then onwards that person entered into a different kind of life, his baptism was therefore as a new birth to him. But when Jesus baptises a man in the Spirit he is at that moment born from above; he is literally made a new man by a miracle wrought in him by Jesus. This is one of the major reasons why Jesus did not

practise water baptism — it is of the earth, earthy. The baptism in Spirit is of the heavens, heavenly. Jesus only baptises from heaven. He is now ascended into heaven and from thence baptises men in the Spirit. Water baptism, as practised by John Baptist or any other person, is nothing more than a picture of new birth. Spirit baptism as practised by Jesus is the actual one and only new birth; John's water baptism but poorly prefigured it. It is very difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Lord approved of what would now by some be called anabaptism, for it is almost impossible not to believe that some, if not all those His disciples baptised in water had previously been baptised by John. Be that as it may, one thing is very clear: water baptism is a figure of new birth and Spirit baptism is that new birth. What God hath joined together let no man put

asunder; a man must be born of water and of the Spirit says Jesus.

Having established this truth the Lord went forth to call men to Himself and to a new kind of discipleship. The kind of discipleship He intends for all men is that same life of discipline which He Himself knew as a human being on this earth. He said of Himself, 'the Son can do nothing of himself but what he seeth the Father do', and it is written of Him that He was led of the Spirit into the wilderness. Throughout His life He made remarks utterly consistent with the spirit of these truths, such as, 'as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do, arise let us go', and 'I know that His commandment is life everlasting, whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak'. Jesus of Nazareth was a disciple; He is also our Lord,

and as He said, the disciple is not above his Lord; He has given us an example; He is also an ensample of what God means by discipleship and when we respond to Him He never asks or expects us to do or be anything He did not do or Himself become when He became a man. He did not leave it to another to show us what discipleship means, He has shown us Himself.

When Nicodemus came to Jesus he had no idea of what true discipleship meant; he made no secret of the fact that he and others regarded Jesus as a teacher, for he called Him that, 'teacher, we know thou art a teacher come from God'. He was himself the teacher of Israel and he undoubtedly wished to talk to Jesus on that level, but the Lord would have none of it. Like so many of his day (and ours too for that matter) he wanted things to be kept theological without any

suggestion of personal commitment, He must have been absolutely astonished when Jesus told him that he must be born — he had no intention of getting on to such intensely personal grounds. He was intellectually stimulated by Jesus' miraculous powers and was naturally inquisitive, but he was not prepared to throw in his lot with the Lord. Many have followed his example, but in doing so have thrown away the best in life. Happily the impression made on Nicodemus by the Lord was so great that he could not stand aside from Him completely; he eventually took a public stand for Him, but by that time he had missed so much. What would he have done if the Lord had specifically called him, as He did the apostles?

3. At Cana of Galilee.

It is a very enlightening experience to trace the training and spiritual progress of the men who did respond to the Lord and follow Him; their regard for Him must have been recognised at a very early stage, for they were invited with Him to the marriage at Cana of Galilee. There they witnessed the very first miracle He ever performed. It was not much more than a simple demonstration of His amazing power. In context of spiritual truth the miracle has much to teach us, but at the time it was perhaps seen only as a neighbourly act. No-one was healed, no devils were cast out, no-one sought and found forgiveness, there was no message preached or prophetic word given, the hungry were not fed and, although it involved water and wine, it cannot be said

the thirsty were given drink, for nobody there could possibly have been thirsty. It was a festal occasion and somehow, possibly because Jesus had more disciples than anticipated, the wine ran out. 'They have no wine' said. Mary His mother to Jesus, 'Woman what have I to do with thee?' said Jesus to her, 'mine hour is not yet come', and the incident seemed closed. But as though somehow she was expecting something extraordinary to happen, she said to the servants, 'Whatsoever He saith unto you do it'.

His waiting disciples could never have anticipated what was about to happen, but oh, if they had been listening to the exchange between Jesus and His mother, what a wonderful lesson of discipleship they would have learned from their Master. Earthly father He had none, but He made

clear that He had left His mother and His former commitment to her entirely. Any claims she had or had thought she had on her son were decisively broken — until then it had been 'Mother' — now it was 'Woman' — He had put her away — left her for God and the call and His life work and them. 'What have I to do with thee?' She had no more influence over Him. She had borne Him but He was not hers and deep down inside she knew it; He was God's. Whether or not He had talked much with her since the marvellous episode at Jordan is impossible to tell with certainty, but knowing Him and His ways we can well imagine the kind of things that would have been said in the home that day when He returned with two men. From that time forward men continued to gather to Him; that is why they were invited with Him to

the wedding, there to hear His words of final severance from His family and His total commitment to God and them. Whatever proper maternal guidance and disciplining Mary had ever exercised over her son till then was now finished; He had nothing more to do with her and should she further seek to interfere in His life it would be nothing more than sheer presumption.

This necessary reproof, firmly delivered to her, was in the nature of a primary lesson for His disciples who all needed to learn it; Jesus was setting an example for all time. This lesson may well be called the cost of discipleship. It could not have been an easy moment for either Jesus or Mary; on her part it was certainly unexpected. Perhaps it raised a few eyebrows among the disciples, but if they had listened to her next words they would have learned another vital

primary lesson also: 'Whatsoever He saith unto you do it'. No man could ever hear sounder advice than that; they were greatly privileged to have witnessed the costly exchange. Discipleship demands instant, utter, exact, implicit obedience, right through life from the beginning to the end. Right there before their eyes they saw the result of the servants' unquestioning obedience to the Lord's commands. It amounted to willing and unquestioning co-operation; they co-operated with Jesus to the full. 'Fill the water pots with water' and they filled them — up to the brim. What a lesson; up to the brim — it was full, unstinting obedience — and see the result — 'draw out now'. And they bore it. The ruler of the feast tasted the water that was made wine and thought it was good: it was, and he said so to the bridegroom. Of course

it was good — it was as good as everything Jesus created was good.

No wonder this Gospel commences as it does — 'In the beginning' for this is the beginning of miracles. The Lord deliberately took His disciples along with Him to that wedding that they may learn who it was they were following. In this new beginning Jesus reveals Himself as the Creator who does all things well and makes all He creates good — and this time not by His own but by another's pronouncement. He did not say so, He did not as much as touch the water-pots either; the servants did it all under His direction without supervision. At what precise moment the water became wine is not disclosed, but one thing is certain: it all happened when it was in the obedient servants' hands. What a lesson for disciples. They were observers only, He did not ask

them to do anything, He simply showed them 'how it works'. What they thought is private to them, but this we know, they saw His glory 'as of an only begotten with a father'; their Master was full of grace and truth, and they recognised something.

From that moment they knew that the man they were following was truly the Lamb of God. They had taken John Baptist's word for it at first and now by their observation they had proved it to themselves. What they witnessed had amazed them; it would have amazed anybody, for it was scarcely believable. The Lord by whose power and at whose command the miracle had been performed received no praise or thanks from anyone for it at all, or if He did it is not mentioned by the writer; He did not seek any. He stood there silent while the bridegroom was undeservedly congratulated

for the quality of the wine he had not provided. The truth came out later of course, hence the story, but the effect of the incident on the disciples was just what Jesus wanted — they believed on Him. Perhaps this is one of the most amazing points in the story — they had been following Him and were known as His disciples but had not been believing in Him. That may be strange to us, for we connote discipleship with faith, yet here it is — unbelieving disciples.

Attraction without heart-commitment, following without faith — the condition is no less common today than it was then.

The Lord was constantly fighting this battle with unbelief in His disciples' hearts, it was ingrained in them; they had a kind of faith in Him, otherwise they would not have been His disciples, but it was very limited and faint, and entirely human. This battle

continued right through to the end of His life with them on earth — they were constantly disbelieving Him, or else believing insufficiently or mistakenly. Perhaps one of the most arresting exchanges of conversation between Jesus and His disciples recorded in this Gospel is that which occurs at the end of the sixteenth chapter. John reports a situation in which he himself, with the rest of the disciples, was involved. Led by Jesus, the apostolic band was on its way to Gethsemane and the Lord was opening His heart to them about His imminent departure and its effects on them: 'I came forth from the Father and am come into the world: again, I leave the world and go to the Father', He said. His disciples said unto Him, 'now speakest thou plainly now are we sure by this we believe that thou camest forth from God'. Jesus answered

them, 'Do you now believe?' At last He had convinced them He was who He was. It had taken Him over three years to bring those men to this place of true faith and it was so real to Him that He turned immediately in exultant prayer to His Father, 'they have believed that thou hast sent me', He said to Him.

It seems an incredible, almost an impossible thing, that up until that latest hour those disciples should still have been unconvinced of the Lord's true identity, yet it is true. So even though at Cana they believed on Him, it was only with the faintest beginnings of faith, which under His leadership and tuition slowly developed to that point of confession prior to His death. They had so much to learn of Him; how patient He was with them, how understanding and gracious and how

successful. But it was a long hard labour as we shall see.

4. The Well of Sychar.

The next great lesson the Lord taught them was at Sychar in Samaria where He stopped and sat on Jacob's well while His disciples went into the city to buy meat. In their absence a Samaritan woman came to draw water from the well and Jesus struck up a conversation with her, 'Give me to drink', He said, and so began the famous dialogue between them which has brought untold blessing to many millions of saints ever since. It was a private engagement, for throughout its entire length the disciples were absent and had no idea of the matters which so deeply engrossed the hearts of Jesus and the woman, to the exclusion of everybody else. They may have had some notion of the woman's social standing, or have heard something of her reputation; (it

is said that only social outcasts went to draw water at that hour of the day) for upon their return, seeing Jesus talking with the woman, they were amazed to the point of marvelling at Him. Whatever did He want with her?

What was He seeking of that kind of Woman? Why was He even talking to her? Even they would not have spoken to her and He was their leader; they were expecting Him to set a different example from that. They did not say a word to the woman; they did not need to; she sensed their attitude and departed.

It is of essential importance that disciples should learn that attitudes, like actions, speak louder than words. The record does not say so, but it is legitimate to ask whether the Lord sent these men into the town to get them out of the way while He dealt with the woman; not just because He did not wish to

expose her soul to others, even though they be chosen apostles, but also because He knew they would almost certainly hinder Him if they remained. In their absence the woman opened up to the Lord because she sensed His love and sympathy and understanding; she closed up her conversation and her heart as soon as the disciples appeared; it was a most sad moment. For those of us who are wanting to bare our souls to truth the disciples' behaviour was anything but what may have been expected of them. Right from the commencement of this episode it seems they missed the way. They went into the village to buy bread, but Jesus said He sent them to reap; what a world of difference lies between their attitude to discipleship and that of Jesus. By comparison with the Lord, who had one woman upon whom to work,

they had a whole townful of people among whom they could have worked, yet they carried no sheaves and when they did return they succeeded in driving away the lone woman who represented the hundred percent success of the Lord.

Disciples and apostles though these men were, they didn't have a clue of what their calling entailed or of what was going on; they were as dead as dead could be. Behold their conversation and mark the words of the Lord, 'Master eat' ... 'I have meat to eat that ye know not of'. 'Hath any man brought him aught to eat?' 'My meat is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work'. As He was later to say, He lived in another day than theirs and walked in the light of another world, where values and standards were all utterly different from theirs; in His world souls were greater than bread. Sin is

of no power there and can be reckoned as though it had never been and a moment of faith can blot out a lifetime of sin. In His world, in the final reckoning, ignorance and knowledge are taken into account and opportunities are weighed against possibilities. The woman had existed in ignorance and our precious Lord, though knowing her sin, thought the best of her and imputed to her the highest of motives; 'if thou knewest the gift of God and who it is that saith unto thee give me to drink thou wouldest have asked of him and he would have given thee living water'. He paid her a compliment in advance — the apostles imputed the unworthiest of motives to her and even wondered about the Lord - what shame! But then they were as ignorant as she.

They no more knew what meat was than she knew what water was. He had been feeding all the time He had been dealing with the woman, feeding on the will of God. They had been feeding on this world's bread (legitimately enough of course) but they were no more eating the bread and meat Christ knew of than she was. It would be interesting to know what was passing through the minds of those men, especially Peter's, at that time. 'Follow me', He had said to them at the first, 'and I will make you fishers of men'; now He is saying, 'I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour; were they to be reapers as well as fishers? 'Other men laboured and ye have entered into their labours'. They had to learn the importance of doing their duty; unless the harvest is reaped all the labour of others gone before has been in vain. To bring

consummate joy to the sower and crown his work the reaper must labour too. Every disciple must realise what a privileged person he is that he should be chosen to enter into other men's labours. He must realise also that he is a labourer, a worker hired by God who will pay him his wages at the end of the day — and he will get what he has earned; 'he that reapeth receiveth wages'; he also 'gathereth fruit unto life eternal'.

One further vital lesson must be learned from this account of the Lord's encounter with the woman — it may be posed as a question — when does the Lord consider a person to have been properly reaped? Many answers may be attempted to the question, but on the evidence of this chapter it is when that person becomes a worshipper of the Father; that is the immediate objective

to which He moving in all His dealings with men and women. Whenever He deals with men it is to this end and He would consider His labour to be in vain except this be accomplished. No soul is properly reaped unless that soul is well and truly cut off from its former root or stock, and when that happens the life springing up within issues in worship of the Father unto all eternity. Worship, to be worship at all, must be in spirit and in truth though and not just in meetings: Father is seeking this and Jesus knew it. A worshipper is a reaped person, his affections have been won and everything within rises and pours forth to God. There are now no special headquarters of worship, 'neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem'; neither is there any other building or spot, whether regarded as specially sanctified or otherwise; there are

no places of worship any more; places have been replaced by persons. When persons worship the Father in spirit and in truth every place is a place of worship and so is every time and attitude.

The only way we can possibly arrive at truth and understand Jesus is to remember that all the Lord's sayings must be interpreted in the light of His person; He is THE Light, and He said of Himself, 'I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me'. So when He says we must worship in spirit and in truth He means we must worship with the entirety of our life; He did, and He has gone to the Father. With all His being as a man He worshipped the Father, calling Him the only true God. All He ever did or said was unto His Father and He was the truth; the life He lived was the way and anyone who exists on earth any other

way can never hope to come to the Father. Before recording this incident John had earlier written down one of Christ's testimonies, 'the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life'; let every man ponder that in relation to his own words. If we also take into account John's later words, 'let us not love in word but in deed and in truth' we shall arrive at the truest understanding of what God means by worship. Worship may use words but it is not of them and not in them; there are no set biblical forms or attitudes of worship; deed and truth are what the Lord is seeking; as with words, so with worship, all must be spirit and life and truth or all is vain.

5. On a Mountain Side.

The next specific reference to discipleship made by Jesus is in connection with His great miracle of feeding the five thousand from just five loaves and two small fishes. It was a marvellous occasion, mind-staggering to say the least, and John tells us the Passover was at hand. Jesus had carefully planned the event; He Himself set the scene and timed it to perfection; 'He knew what He would do', John says. Reading the other Gospels we can ascertain how easily the Lord manipulated events; He handled situations masterfully to teach men truth as it became necessary for them and as they could bear it. Truth taught before the time can so easily become destructive instead of beneficial to the pupil; understanding and knowledge are cumulative and to be

advantageous lessons must be carefully graded. The Lord was sent to be the teacher of Israel; Nicodemus, the Rabbi or teacher of Israel, recognised that and called Jesus 'Rabbi'. Greater than Nicodemus, Jesus is the teacher of the world, though whether at that time Nicodemus submitted to Him is dubious; he certainly did not become an avowed disciple then. God's command is that all must learn of Him or perish, it is decided all who will are about to learn a lesson from this incident, which, at peril of death, must never be forgotten.

The timing of the lesson is very important. The three synoptists place it following the empowering and authorisation and sending forth of the twelve on their first itinerant ministry and their subsequent return to the Lord. One other thing of note, having bearing upon the miracle and the Lord's

teaching, is also mentioned by two of them, namely the execution of John Baptist; a lot of his disciples were adrift in the land and probably were among the multitudes fed by the Lord that day. Almost certainly these would have known the twelve, for some of them had previously been followers of John and had left him for Jesus; being devout persons themselves these men would have been observing the one their master had declared to be the Christ, wondering whether they should throw in their lot with Him or look for someone else (see Matt. 11 v.3). There was a great deal of unrest and uncertainty among the people as to the merits and demerits and claims of John Baptist and Jesus; Herod, who had ordered John's execution, had himself become inquisitive about Jesus and the activities of His apostles too. Herod was wanting to

know what was going on in his kingdom, especially as he was answerable for his actions to Pilate, his political overlord.

Something was in the air, crisis-point was being reached, decisions had to be made and directions taken and Jesus knew it; the time had come for followers and disciples to be sorted out and apostles faced with reality. It has to come to all of us. Hazy ideas, vague beliefs and woolly notions about true discipleship and total commitment will not do for Jesus, they have to be swept away, people must know what they believe in order to be a disciple, so He set about bringing them to a decision. He was no popular teacher, He was the Son of God and the people had to know it. He was not prepared to allow false notions or current opinion or feeble inconclusiveness to rule men's destinies; the dominant factor in

discipleship is not an insatiable appetite for learning, it is conviction of spirit.

Discipleship is not drifting, neither is it the cultivation of an easy-going spirit which loves comfortable living; discipleship is hard and the time for hard sayings had arrived; a man must be resilient. With typical foresight therefore, and with great care, the Lord, by His almighty power, laid the gracious foundation for the hard sayings He had to speak. He knew they were revolutionary and would offend many and that religionists and die-hard doctrinarians and all the self-opinionated would find His words objectionable and would revolt from Him and fade away; the time of estimation and elimination and election and establishment had come. It was a crisis time deliberately brought on by Christ; He was prepared to face it and so must we be. The Lord

performed the astonishing miracle for this purpose; all would-be disciples must face the fact that every miracle the Lord performs on their behalf is not only a display of power and proof of His love, it is also in some degree a test.

The Lord Jesus never did miracles simply to display His power or merely to draw attention to Himself; here we find evidence of that fact. He had compassion on the multitude; they were hungry and He fed them for that reason, but not for that reason only; He fed them because they were as sheep without a shepherd; they had no-one to lead them into the living pastures.

Nicodemus had not done so, Pharisees and scribes and lawyers and priests and kings and elders could not do so either, and even John Baptist who had given them direction and motivation for a while had never

performed one miracle and now he was dead; where was their leader and shepherd? They could not lead or feed themselves. Jesus therefore commanded them to sit down while He fed them and they ate till they could eat no more and had to leave of His abundance; then, having fed them, He challenged them as to His leadership. Shepherd He was, they could hardly deny that, but could they, would they follow Him? He tested them out completely about this — every single person there, including His chosen apostles, had to face it; none was exempt, no-one was allowed to hide behind election or to plead privilege.

The miracle He performed was perfectly acceptable to them — they all loved and admired Him for it. To many it confirmed their beliefs that He was the most remarkable person in the land if not in the

world, and speculation about Him and His identity was rife. Some even thought He was a re-incarnation of an old prophet; they had no doubt about His capabilities and all the multitude were prepared to elevate Him to sovereignty — if necessary take Him by force and make Him king — such was His popularity and power with the people at that time. But, needless to say, Jesus had not performed the miracle primarily for those reasons; He did it as an object lesson and in order to create the right conditions for the challenge He had to bring and the greater things He had to say. The miracle, beside being an object lesson to the participants, was also the text from which He preached the astonishing message that He was the bread of God and of life from heaven which they must eat; it was this message that did the damage. As people heard it they were

absolutely shattered; they just could not receive it. He lost the goodwill of multitudes of people by it and their attitude toward Him radically changed.

What Jesus said was revolutionary in the extreme, there could be no doubt about it, He had set out deliberately to do what He did; they were thoroughly disillusioned. He referred back to the history of the nation and talked about Moses and the manna their fathers ate, and they knew that many of the things He said were true, but when He insisted that He was the bread of God sent down from heaven and that they must eat thereof if they wanted never to die, they were not so sure. If He had stopped there all may have been well even though they were shaken, but He went on and many of His disciples were horrified to hear Him say His flesh was meat indeed and they must eat it

and His blood was drink indeed and they must drink it. He had gone too far for them, the concept was too much for them, their minds reeled under it and their beings revolted against it; for one thing it was absolutely contradictory to God's word through Moses, for another it was impossible and for another it did not make sense. But He persisted with it and when He said quite deliberately, 'except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood ye have no life in you', it just about finished them; and worse was to come. He actually said, 'I said unto you that no man can come unto me except it were given unto him of my Father'. That did it. Did He really want disciples? 'From that (the word 'time' is not in the Greek) many of His disciples went back and. walked no more with Him'. They went back from that saying and that truth.

This was one of the great testing times of Christ as well as of the disciples; He found no pleasure in causing offence to people, especially disciples; but He just had to do it. Every disciple and every 'would-be' disciple has to face the fact that he can only come to Christ if and when the Father draws him: no-one else can really come and no-one else can draw him. Too many people have come to their own image of Christ and are following an imaginary Jesus; they have never faced reality; they are living in a world of religious fantasy; it was so in Jesus' day as well as our own and He knew it then as He knows it now. He also knew that the Father draws men away from the popular idol Jesus to the real Christ, the Son of Man and of God; because He loved men and women He had to tell them the truth, they had to be faced with spirit and life and blood and

flesh, both His and theirs. This is so important to everybody that upon that occasion He turned to the chosen twelve and said, 'will ye also go away?' He gave even them the opportunity to leave Him too, but they couldn't do it: 'Lord to whom else shall we go?' they said, 'Thou hast the words of eternal life'. Peter was the spokesman for the apostles as he so often was, 'we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ the Son of the living God'. They knew who they were following and what they wanted and they were under the drawings of the Father; their discipleship had been tested, they had passed through a critical phase with flying colours, but much greater tests lay ahead. Three solemn things lie before us; each of them is of equal importance to everyone who wishes to be a disciple; every single person must: (1) be drawn to Christ by the

Father; (2) be called and chosen of Christ; (3) voluntarily choose to follow Christ. None but these are disciples. In this tremendous section of teaching by the Lord we are shown the most fundamental factor of and reason for discipleship, namely the imitation of Christ. By this it is not intended that men should think of pretentious imitation, or mimicry, which is nothing but vain hope and self-deception, but of the reproduction of the Christ-life in themselves by the power and grace of God. Christ was not addressing Himself to the carnal appetites or fleshly ambition of men but to their spirits and their life. Everything He said was an issuing of His spirit and a statement of His life, as well as an utterance of His lips; in this instance it was an unfolding of His means of life — why and how He was what He was. Here it is as He said. it, 'the living Father hath sent me,

and I live by the Father', that is discipleship; He was Himself the Apostle, the Sent One, in other words God's Disciple. Everyone therefore who would be a disciple must imitate that. Again here are His exact words more fully, 'As the living Father hath sent me and I live by the Father so he that eateth me shall live by me'. He looked to, listened to and obeyed His Father; He did what His Father said, copied what His Father did; in other words He followed Him. That is discipleship as Christ revealed it.

The man who seeks Jesus must seek Him as a hungry, thirsting man searching for food and drink in order to live. Until a man realises he can only live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God he will never be a disciple of Jesus Christ, for He was all those words in manifestation, He was the Word, God's ultimate Word to man.

There has to come a time when the hard, solid truth has to be faced. Soft gentle truth we all love. We love the idea of being a lost woolly sheep and the Good Shepherd finding us, but He reserved that truth till later, lest sentiment blind us to reality. Green pastures are nice and good for sheep, but His sheep are men and He is God and we must be God's Sons. New birth translates the truth found in human types and figures, where men are grass and their glory the flower of grass, into eternal reality, where Christ is God's bread and His children's meat, and humans are made divine. These are great things, but disciples must learn them or go away. He does not wish any man to draw back from the Father's drawings. His inquiry to the twelve must have been full of pleading, 'please do not go away, O please I want you to come on with me — all the

way'. He had called them, they were held by far more than an attraction to Him; a disciple must know in his heart that he is specially wanted and must make his response.

The Lord Jesus was an absolutely honest man. He kept truth always before the people and those who followed Him most closely heard it most often. In different ways, under contrasting figures and with varying emphases, He made men and women count the cost of discipleship carefully. Other writers bring this out according to their insights into the particular themes the Lord pursued in course of His teaching about discipleship and John reports the Lord as saying further, 'if ye continue in my word then are ye my disciples indeed and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free'. It is quite obvious that, having set a course for His disciples, all His successive

words about it must be as clear and uncompromising as ever and these are certainly of the same spirit and calibre as any of His former remarks. He is speaking to believers and at that time there were many of them — believers like followers and hangers-on must be shown the truth. Believing must lead to certain results which may be seen and known of all men or it is in vain. Believing is necessary, but it must be the right kind of believing or it avails nothing in God's sight and profits the believer nothing.

6. In His Father's House.

The Lord set the background for His further teaching by a stroke of genius and an act of mercy. It was so typical of Him. The day it happened He was in the temple teaching all who came to Him when bursting in as rudely as ever, the scribes and Pharisees brought unto Him a woman. She had been taken in adultery they said, and they set her in the midst and accused her of her crime before all. It was an unusual ploy even for the Pharisees and, whatever everybody else thought about it, Jesus acted as though He did not want to listen to the accusations. He appeared to wish to totally ignore the whole thing, for He stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger. What He was doing did not seem to communicate itself to those men; His attitude did not please them

at all and they became so incensed against Him that they pressed their accusations further, demanding an answer; what they were wanting was to accuse Him to the authorities for seditious teaching. But the Lord was far too wise for them, He knew their purpose, they were not as clever as they thought; it is foolish of men to try and pit their knowledge and wits against the Lord's. Armed as they were with their knowledge of the law and Roman laws and having a clear-cut case, they thought they had Him cornered, but they were no match for Him.

With one word He fulfilled Moses' law, kept Roman law, perfected the law of human being and revealed the law of God in Christ. Moses' law said she should be stoned, Roman law forbade stoning, the law of human being demands that we love our

neighbour as ourselves, and the law of God, that is God's law governing His own being and words and works in Christ, forbade Him condemning anybody. The Lord's word, 'he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her' was absolutely masterly. It was a word of wisdom, a word of mercy and justice, of love and righteousness; it completely floored them; they were shamed and silenced and totally exposed. Stunned and conscience-smitten, one by one, from the eldest to the youngest, man and woman, everybody (perhaps even including the elect apostles also) except the adulteress and Jesus, went out. God was left alone in His temple with a sinner.

Behold our God! Let us see Him high and lifted up in the temple with nothing but His train filling it, His train of glory. No throne can ever exalt Him higher than this, for His

throne is not of ivory or of gold or precious stones; they are all too cheap and mean for Him. His throne is of grace and love and of white righteousness and everlasting mercy; even His chariot was paved with love for this daughter of Jerusalem that day, for a greater than Solomon was there. He did not sit for judgement on the woman, He did not even pass sentence on her shabby accusers, neither did he send them away but, without counter-accusation or condemnation let them all go. As He had once told Mary, His hour had not yet come, it was a time of forgiveness and grace to all. When He pointed His finger it was not at her or them, it was to write on the ground. They had pointed the finger of accusation at her, having already condemned her in their hearts; but not He — His finger was pointed to the earth to write something there. What

He wrote we do not know; what we do know is that the word of God through Jeremiah is 'they who depart from the Lord shall be written in the earth' — and they all went out one by one.

Perhaps also He was pointing us to the earth and thereby saying, 'I know your frame, I remember you are but dust, you are of fallen man and cursed earth, I don't condemn you. How can I condemn anyone for sinning or call any man or woman a sinner? Had I not been born from heaven of a virgin mother and the sinless Father I would have been a sinner like everyone else'. In dealing with this woman Jesus was not only being gracious to a guilty sinner, He was being honest and true to Himself. If He had been anything other than loving and gentle He would not have been righteous. A person can only be condemned after refusing to

believe on and come to Jesus — 'this is the condemnation that light is come into the world and men love darkness rather than light, neither do they come to the light lest their deeds should be reproved' This woman had been brought to the light — almost certainly against her will, but having come she remained when all others had fled; that is her commendation. Her reward was, 'neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more', it was wonderful; she was uncondemned, free, she was also at crisis point. Jesus' next words were of critical importance to her as they are to everyone who has undergone an experience similar to this woman's. When that happens it is the time to hear His declaration, 'I am the light of the world, he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life'. The Pharisees said that, because He

bore record of Himself His record was not true; but it was true — the preceding episode with the woman proved it to be true. We can afford to ignore perversely ignorant men, but what did His word do to her? Did she follow Christ? With all sincerity we must hope she did, for her own sake — to be brought to the light to meet the Lord and then depart from Him and it is to bring upon ourselves greater condemnation.

She was not called by name to follow the Lord, but the declaration and claim of the Lord was unmistakably and openly made for all to heed; He is still on the subject of discipleship — come out of darkness, follow Me, have the light of life. If she heard it did she heed it? The Pharisees did not do so, but surely she had no desire in her heart to be as they; they had proved themselves to be her enemies, and she knew she could

believe and trust Christ, she had every reason to. But what a commandment He had given her — 'go and sin no more', what a promise and what a possibility, and what a prospect for a life. Could she really believe Him? Should she venture all on His word? Was she among those Jews who believed on Him to whom He said, 'if ye continue in my word then are ye my disciples indeed and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free'?

Believing is action, it is an inner commitment of the heart to something — 'I think that is true'. But no-one can be saved except he or she commits self; salvation is by believing in a person. The word or truth or idea must be continued in. Believing in order to be true must bring the life compulsion: believing is continuous action. Believing is the only way to discover truth; by continuous believing

comes knowledge of truth to the point of certainty, this is the way of believing.

This way of believing, or 'the believing way', is perhaps a better and more expressive phrase than 'the life of faith'. The word faith is a noun: John rarely uses it and never in his Gospel, where he uses the word believe, the word of action; it is simpler. Faith considered as a word can induce speculation and contemplation in a heart struggling for definition, but the word 'believes' is readily understood, even by the most irreligious. Jesus Himself used the word 'believe' in its various forms more than the word faith, preferring rather to reduce everything to the point of active response than to introduce talking-points to men's hearts.

It is certain that the Lord never thought about Himself and His mission and manhood in other than the simplest of terms. A glance

back over this chapter with this in mind is most illuminating. Here is a selection of the phrases He used at this time which could be helpful to anyone wanting to know how He lived: 'I am', 'I know', 'the Father sent me', 'I came', 'I go', 'I speak', 'I do'. With the exception of the first one, these phrases are all expressions of some form of action: properly understood they supply much information about our Lord and the simplicity of His life to hearts willing to learn. This basic element of simplicity is one of the hallmarks of true disciples — we all must continue in truth and light into perfect freedom by the way of believing; there is no other way to be free.

The freedom the Lord wants us all to enjoy is His own freedom, namely the freedom of son-ship. Believers must become disciples and sons. This is the message the Lord is

declaring here. It is strange and horrifying to discover as we read on that within a few minutes many who started out by believing on Him took up stones to stone Him. Jesus prevented the murder by hiding Himself from them, but to those who desire to be wholly His, who will believe Him fully and continually follow Him into all truth, His words are spirit and life and utmost liberty. Naturally by contrast we associate the word freedom with bondage, and seeing He uses it when speaking of knowing truth, its meaning is freedom from error and ignorance and lies. What bondage lies in the power of these three contenders for the heart of man and how many are bound by them. Only Jesus can make us free from them and then only as we continue in His word; we cannot be disciples indeed unless we do. One liberating stroke is sufficient to

make us free, but it is not sufficient to keep us in liberty if we will not continue in what He says. What He does is insufficient to maintain us in the personal liberty He creates for us, unless from that moment we go on with Him.

At this point the Lord reveals His main objective in calling each one of us to a continual believing walk with Him, it is to free us from the servitude of sin and bring us into 'the house'. He does not specify the house, but just refers to it; we have to read a little further to discover whose house it is. Even then He does not say where it is, but simply tells us to whom it belongs — 'My Father's House'; this can be no other than the place where God lives, His home. The Lord's commission and therefore His main concern was to fulfil the charge God gave Him. This was not merely to go before His

people as a leader, He also had to prepare a place for them that finally they may be received by Him into His own eternal position in the presence of the Father to live with Him there. The Son abideth in the house for ever, He said, servants do not. They all understood what He was saying, it was common enough social practice and therefore general knowledge, but whether many fully grasped all He meant is doubtful. The implications of His words are startling: He is talking very directly about committing sin and says he who does so is the slave of sin. There can be no doubt that He intends us all to infer from His words that if we are bond-slaves of sin we shall not abide in His Father's house for ever. We have to be made free by the Son from the bond-slavery of sin if we wish to abide with the Son.

Only if believers of His day continued in His word would they be disciples indeed He said, for only thereby could they know the truth that would make them free from having to commit sin. It was a great time of teaching; truth can only be discovered through following Him. They stood listening to the heavenly Teacher's further words on this theme and learned much about murder and fatherhood; He spoke of the devil and his lies and of seeing death, and then of Himself. There was great contention between the Lord and the Jews about these things. So great was their hatred that Jesus was denounced as a devil-possessed Samaritan, a child of fornication, and they attempted to murder Him. It seems impossible that hearts can so quickly switch from belief to unbelief and hostility and murder, yet here is evidence that they can

and did. How is this possible and how so quickly? Jesus had exposed their false position. They actually believed that being Abraham's earthly progeny they were not in bondage to any man, when all the time they were slaves to sin. They had believed in Jesus over the top of personal sin and false beliefs. No man can be a true disciple on these grounds.

The Lord had shown this earlier when speaking about the living bread. Many had left Him then, preferring their own ideas to His, but this did not deter Him from speaking the truth. He did so at the cost of losing followers then and He did so again, and still does so. To be a disciple a man must forsake all He has; in no other realm is this more true than in the realm of truth. Conversion to Jesus Christ entails rejection of all former beliefs about Him and self, especially on the

points introduced in this section of scripture. A man must believe without reserve that: (1) Jesus is the Son of God; (2) he must continue in Christ's word; (3) he himself is from beneath; (4) he must be made free from sin; (5) his father is the devil. This is the truth every man must know in order that knowing it he will do something about it. But they did not hear His word or understand what He was saying, but true to His calling He told them the truth and those who rose superior to fear and followed Him to the end were led to the place He prepared on earth for His people at Golgotha. By the cross He prepared and sanctified them to His own use: He prepares all who have since followed Him there en route to Father's home; all they who go to the cross have learned of Him and have known the truth, no-one else has. This is what He implied when He said,

'take up the cross and follow me'. Only those who have done so are His disciples; He sought to discipline people to this, and being disciplined by Him to this degree and experience, the disciple, by common consent of the Godhead, has been renamed 'saint', for as the disciple makes the cross of Christ his own personal cross he is freed from the bondage of sin.

7. The Pool of Siloam.

In its initial phase discipleship consists in a voluntary change and definite switch of the heart by the power of God from one line of believing to another. This is brought out to us clearly in the account of the miracle wrought on the man who was blind from birth. It is a very precious record of truth, simply told, which in its unfolding brings out the amazing fact that a man can be a disciple of Jesus in his heart before he properly knows who He is and commits himself to following Him. Earlier we learned what is required of a follower of the Lord and the effect on His disciples of the words, 'Except ye eat my flesh and drink my blood ye have no life in you'. Outwardly they were visibly and perhaps also professedly following Him, but in mind and heart they were not and the

Lord knew it, so with one hard saying He divided between the sheep and the goats — He always will.

It was not so with this man though; when the Lord first met him He was escaping from them and their murderous designs on His life, bypassing a lot of other men in doing so. But when He saw this man, under an impulse from the Spirit Jesus stopped, for He knew He must work a work of power on him. He was walking in the light of life of which He had spoken so He could see. He knew a potential disciple when He saw one, even though the man was blind at the time. The way the miracle was performed is unique in scripture; neither during nor after it was the man called or commanded to follow Jesus; on the contrary he was told to go. He did so and came seeing — the miracle was completed upon his obedience, but that

was only a beginning. There followed such a state of fear and pandemonium, with arguments and denunciations and quarrelling on every hand that it may well have been thought by an observer that a terrible crime had been committed. Such is the power of prejudice. It seems the poor man had always posed a problem since the day it was discovered that he was born blind. O the superstition that bound the hearts and minds of God's people in those days. Even the disciples were bound by current religious and doctrinal error, though they had followed the Lord many a month and had watched Him at work and had listened to His teachings. It came out of their mouth by universal consent, 'Master, who did sin, this man or his parents that he was born blind?' They actually thought that the man's blindness was a result of or

punishment for his parents' or his own sin. The Lord quickly dispelled that erroneous idea, 'Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents', He said, 'but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. I must work', and He did, in the broad light of day. Just what effect this had on the disciples is not told, but it had a mighty effect on the man. Had the disciples eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart to understand, the events they witnessed were an illustration of what He had been trying to teach them earlier. The miracle was an instance of a man believing the Lord, continuing in His word and knowing the truth and being made free (from blindness). How many of those disciples who had been following Him for months had a comparable testimony, or even one remotely like it? We cannot help how we were born, we cannot choose our

parents, but we can choose whether to obey or disobey the Lord. Although a man is not born physically blind he can still have a real testimony of Christ's miraculous power working in him. All disciples without exception must have a clear basic testimony, every one must be able to say with this man 'I know'.

He made no pretence of knowing the things they thought he ought to know, he simply told the truth and in doing so testified to Jesus. Doing that he gave clear evidence that his heart had become convinced of truth deeper than the miracle, beyond the power that gave him power of sight. Whether or not he recognised it, the Pharisees saw it easily and were convinced that he was now a disciple of Christ; they were right, so he was. Without walking so much as one step to follow Jesus physically he was a true

disciple, even though he did not know who He was when he eventually met Him. The man was a disciple in heart as soon as he obeyed the Lord. Whether He says 'Come' or 'Go', obey Him; it is the first step in discipleship. As we have already seen, one who knew Jesus better than any at that time said, 'Whatsoever He saith unto you do it', we could not be better advised, even by the Holy Ghost Himself.

It is hard not to believe that the Lord was thinking of this man when He told His famous story of the Jewish sheepfold and His sheep, for it appears He was talking to the same people when He revealed Himself to the man as the Son of God. This parable is the only one of Jesus' many stories that John records, and it would be more than a little strange if it is not included here without some connection with what the Lord had

just done. The parable is in fact an introduction to the greatly loved truth He wanted to tell about the goodness of the Shepherd of Israel. The Lord felt the people should now hear it; the miracle presented Him with the perfect opportunity, for it was an outstandingly suitable example of what He wanted to show them. Therefore He tells His story which everyone should read, for wonderful it is.

What a masterly storyteller Jesus was; He was an absolute genius at gathering up all the elements of truth He wished to illustrate and weaving around them a gem of a story. The parable is all about the voice, in fact the word occurs three times: the voice the sheep hear, the voice the sheep know and the voice they do not know. It is also about the sheep being led and being put forth and following their shepherd and refusing to

follow a stranger. It was a simple enough parable, absolutely true to life, but His hearers did not understand a word of what He was saying, even though they had witnessed the perfect demonstration of what He meant. The man was blind; he could not see the one who spoke to him, put clay on his eyes and told him to go and wash in Siloam. Everyone would have agreed that Jesus was a complete stranger to him, but somehow, for some reason beyond natural desire to see, that man obeyed Him. When Jesus later found him excommunicated from the temple and said to him 'dost thou believe on the Son of God?' his attitude is most striking, 'who is he Lord that I might believe on him?' He knew that the one speaking to him was the Lord — he had never seen Him before, but the voice was the same — 'thou hast both seen Him and it

is He that speaketh with thee'; 'Lord I believe', he responded and worshipped Him then and there as the Son of God.

That man was a sheep and a disciple and a worshipper all at once, a living testimony, he became a perfect illustration and typical example to all that Jesus was the Shepherd of the sheep. Sheep will not follow strangers; they do not know their voices, but like this man they have to be prepared to pay the price and fulfil the conditions of discipleship — they must be put forth from the sheepfold. The Lord put this man forth: He knew He would and intended to do so when He put clay on his eyes; the authorities had excommunicated Jesus and they excommunicated His sheep also. This is inevitable if the group, religion or national religion is anti-Christ, that is anti the Christ of truth. All Christ's true disciples are put

forth and led out of something or somewhere if they follow Jesus, but they are not afraid about it for He calleth them by name and they know His voice and He goeth before them. This too is part of what He meant when He said, 'if any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me'. If a man is a stranger to the cross, Jesus is a stranger to him.

The importance of hearing the voice of the Lord cannot be over-emphasized, the truth of it can be misunderstood but not overstressed. As long as we understand the difference between the voice that is natural and outward and the voice that is spiritual and inward we shall be safe. It is the same also with discipleship — inward spiritual discipleship is what the Lord is seeking and not primarily that which is outward. It was

only to be expected that men would actually follow the Lord when He was manifest in the flesh; He purposely set out to be a visible leader among men and deliberately called them to Himself with this intention. That was all very well and quite proper at that time; by this God made it easier as well as reasonable, so that the idea of discipleship could be sown in hearts by means of that which was visible. John, in his epistle, pays tribute to the benefit he received by the Word being made flesh for this purpose: 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled of the Word of life; that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you'.

This is the way he speaks of his own experience; he was first called, then became

a disciple and then an apostle. But afterwards, following Calvary and Pentecost, he passed beyond the outward experience into fellowship with God and when that happened he ceased entirely to speak of following the Lord and introduced the word that described his relationship with God, the Father and the Son. He was no longer following in the sense in which he followed as a disciple when Jesus was manifest in flesh on earth, but in a different way — he was walking with Him in fellowship in the Spirit. He said so, 'our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son', and he wrote his epistle so that, like those earliest apostles, we also may have fellowship with the Father and the Son and with each other.

John has sown the seed of this truth in his Gospel, for although Jesus, being a man, was led of the Spirit and was taught of God and

in the truest sense was the Disciple and the Apostle, beyond all that men saw He walked in unbroken fellowship with His Father. This is the thing that gripped John about this wonderful Man; he 'beheld His glory, the glory as of an only-begotten with a father'. This is why the word disciple is never used in scripture of Jesus. Even the suggestion of the idea was obnoxious to John Baptist; that is one of the reasons he at first so strongly refused baptism to the Lord. Everybody he baptised became his disciple and it could never be that Jesus should be his disciple; the very thought of it was almost blasphemous to John. Yet Jesus insisted on being baptised. He knew He had to fulfil all righteousness and baptism is one of the indications of submission to discipleship. In His case though it was not to John Baptist as a man but to His Father and the Holy Ghost

and also as confirmation of John's ministry. All righteousness was in the act and all the time Jesus was fulfilling His ministry among men He was a learner, that is a disciple, and because He was Himself a learner He called men to learn of Him in the yoke of discipleship.

His was a spiritual discipleship, He had no visible leader or teacher, only the inward one; in this he was our perfect example, for the whole point of outward discipleship is to lead men to inward discipleship. This is part of the reason why He said to Nicodemus 'ye must be born again'. Nicodemus had said to Him 'we know that thou art a teacher come from God'; he was right, but by His answer Jesus immediately countered the beginnings of an erroneous idea in the man's mind. All men need to be born from above so that the inward teacher who speaks within with an

inward voice might come to them — that is why Jesus said it. There is no outward visible leader today, there is no outward audible voice calling, it is the era of the invisible Holy Spirit who speaks within. People must follow Christ within now; discipleship cannot now be practised apart from fellowship with the Lord, but this privilege no-one knew while He was with them in the flesh.

We gather some hint of the superiority of the inward over the outward in this matter of discipleship by making reference to the Bethany home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Nowhere is it recorded or even suggested that those three were disciples of Jesus. It is lawful to suppose that each of them, or all of them together, may at one time or another have followed Him as did others, but we are not told it was so. Yet who can believe other than that they were His

devoted disciples, perhaps more than many another who mingled with and made up the crowds who followed Him about? They loved Him devotedly and He loved them just as dearly and more, yet He never called out one of them by name to become His follower, but chose to let them stay in their home. On one occasion when He called on them there Mary sat at His feet to learn of Him and Martha served Him; upon another visit He raised Lazarus, who both died and rose again believing in Him. In the last days of His earthly life He stayed in their home enjoying their love till He went finally to the upper room and Gethsemane and Gabbatha and Golgotha and the garden tomb and glory. Without question Martha, Mary and Lazarus, though not numbered among His public followers, were inward disciples indeed.

Perhaps one of the greatest helps to a fair assessment of John's nature and personality is the fact that he never directly uses the title 'apostle' of himself. Surprisingly enough it does not even occur in his Gospel when he speaks about his fellow-apostles either, though he loved and respected them very much; he carefully and pointedly clung to the word disciple throughout. Perhaps his purpose for this is to indicate, by the Spirit's guidance and inspiration, where in his opinion the proper emphasis should lie; he was a very humble man. His preference for what may be thought by some to be the humbler title and lower calling is quite marked in his description of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. It seems it was universal with those men that they did not wish to be called apostles. Paul, who was not a member of the original band, says quite

firmly he was not fit to be called an apostle and only called himself by that title when necessary. They were not ashamed of the name — it was honourably bestowed upon them by the Lord, but it was not bestowed as denoting titular rank, as though to have it were a thing to be sought for or grasped at. In common with the word disciple the name is descriptive; it means 'sent one', and that is how those men bore it; to them and to the Lord it meant they were sent. It was a new name in sacred writ and also in Israel's spiritual history, though prophets such as Isaiah and other great men of old, such as Moses, certainly knew what it was to be God's sent ones.

8. In the Upper Room.

The Lord raised up men and called them apostles with a view to building His Church, and Paul who was himself an apostle said he thought the Lord had 'set forth us the apostles last', implying that apostles were the final group of men particularly named by God whom the world would see before the second advent. Men may create, indeed have since created, Popes and Ecclesiastics, Gurus and Cardinals and many others, but whatever office they may hold or whatever name they may bear, God did not create it: all such positions and names may be regarded as being contrary to the revealed will of God. It is refreshing to read John's simple heart on the matter; the feet Jesus washed were apostles' feet, including Judas's, but John who found the Lord at his

own feet that day called all those men, except Jesus, disciples. With his Lord kneeling at his feet how could he do otherwise? It was by far the better description.

He could have argued that by His action Jesus had exalted them all above apostleship or discipleship to the heights of lordship, but he knew better. At least he and Peter, surely all of them, felt humbled and shamed by it; their Sovereign was their servant, wherever could they put their heads? Their only refuge was His love; He did not do it to shame them but because He loved them. He is altogether lovely and soon John got as close up to Jesus as it was possible for any of them to come and laid his head on His breast. He was the disciple whom Jesus loved, he said; again he could not find it in himself to call himself an apostle; like Paul

he felt he was not fit to be one. He called himself a disciple — a learner — because that was what he was; the Apostle had washed his feet and he knew then that he was less than an apostle, if apostle meant anything other, or should be made to mean anything above a slave.

Every one of those men, who that day knew they were disciples, were soon to hear Him say, 'ye are my friends; henceforth I call you not slaves, for the slave knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends'. They knew what their Lord and Master had done, He had washed their feet, He had also added, 'I have given you an example, ye ought to wash one another's feet'. In other words He was saying, 'be slaves, be disciples, learn of me and act to one another as I have done to you, and now He was adding further, 'keep my commandments and be my

friends'. In His great love He became as a slave and washed their feet and now as their friend of greatest love He told them He was going to lay down His life for them. O how He loved them and longed for them to be disciples indeed and to give themselves up to learn of Him and His great love and how to express it properly to one another.

This was His great concern for them all before they left that upper room. They must be known in the world as men that loved one another. Whatever men thought of them when they became His companions and comrades and followed Him on earth, after He left all men must be able to recognise them by their love. 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another', He said. They had power, no-one could doubt they had power, they had preached the gospel, healed the

sick, cast out devils, borne the cross; men knew they were His apostles, wouldn't they be known as His disciples for that? They were also men of loyalty and perseverance, they had left all to follow Him, they had put their hand to the plough and had never looked back; surely that was a mark of discipleship. They were also greatly privileged men; no-one could deny that, He had called them and chosen them and commissioned them; why did He not mention these things? They were most important weren't they? Surely men of power and perseverance and privilege as they were would easily be recognised as His disciples by anybody. Jesus did not think so. Peter, spokesman for them all as usual, was baffled and hurt by the Lord's words. It was he who had said, 'we have left all and followed thee'; now he says 'why cannot I

follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake'. That is what he thought, but Jesus thought differently and told him so in words now famous among us, 'the cock shall not crow till thou hast denied me thrice'. They all would have said they loved Him and loved one another and so saying would have been speaking the truth; He would not have denied it, but that was not good enough for Him. They must love one another with a new love — His love — 'as I have loved you'; in God's sight that is the mark of discipleship. We must love with the love of Jesus, in Jesus' way; His way of love and loving can only be learned personally, His love is individually bestowed and demonstrated — it is not a general kind of feeling which has to be assumed and taken for granted; this positive, personal love is the hallmark of discipleship, nothing else is.

The test of their discipleship was not their love for Him but their love for one another. Perhaps that sounded strange in their ears; they would have wanted to make their love and devotion to Him the test, but He would not allow that. The proof of a man's love for the Lord is his love for all those beside himself whom the Lord has chosen. A disciple must realise the individuality of loving, 'love as I have loved you'. God's love for the world is so vast and the impact on us of the famous statement by John in chapter 3 is so great, that we can miss the individuality of it. Yet we ought not to do so, for this love for the individual underlies all God's commandments and statements about His love. The two-part summary of the ten commandments given to Israel was well-known to the eleven and cannot be less well-known to us, for the Lord repeated it:

'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God' and 'thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'. The test of a person's love for God was to be assessed by a neighbour, not an angel. A man's neighbour could judge how much his neighbour loved God by how much or how little he loved him, and that is what God intends.

Christ carried over this same intention of God into the new covenant with a difference; He applied it in a different way and how glad we ought to be about that. Every man must stand up to Jesus' test and be prepared for his alleged genuineness to be judged thereby. Each person's love for Jesus turns upon Jesus' love for him or her as an individual. John speaks of loving Him 'because He first loved us', and Paul says of himself and his relationship with God's Son, 'He loved me and gave Himself for me'. It is a

wonderful thing if a man says 'I love Him', but it cannot be acceptable to God on any other grounds than a personal recognition and appropriation of His love and work for him as an individual. His first real knowledge of eternal love is not of his own love to God but of God's love toward him; everything turns on that. Disciples are not instructed to love each other as they love the Lord but as He loves them. Israel were commanded to love their neighbours as themselves, and that is good, though perhaps rare today, but beyond that the Church and saints of God are charged with higher things.

A person may judge how much I know and have experienced of Jesus' love by the amount and kind of love I have toward him or her. I must stand among my fellow-disciples at the judgement-bar of God's word. If I do not love them each one

individually, as Jesus has loved and still loves me, I testify that I know little or nothing of His great love, even though I constantly talk about it. John says 'little children let us not love in word but in deed and in truth'. Love is not in words, though they be imagined to be words of love, such as 'I love you', and mouths be full of what may be called endearments. Of course let our love be vocalised — John did not mean to tell us we should not tell one another we love one another; he was drawing our attention to the fact that love is not a word, love is (a) being, life — a person — which must express itself in attitudes and actions, that is in truth, reality and actual fact. It must be seen and felt and known and proved and witnessed to by another, or else it is not love. Love has its tender tones and sweet words, but they are

the least part of it; the test of love is always 'as I have loved you'.

Paul's heartfelt confession cannot be bettered, 'the Son of God gave Himself': what a testimony! He had love so He loved — that is John's testimony of Jesus; here it is in John's words: 'having loved His own which were in the world He loved them unto the end'. That is all love knows to do, it cannot do otherwise; to do or even to think differently is to cease to be. Love found it impossible to do other than what He did that night to His disciples and what He did was consistent with all He had ever done. Because of this, because He was the person He was and did these things, John wrote, 'God is Love' ; he discovered it for himself and discovering it made it the transcendent theme of his message. In the end a man's testimony of his friend and brother must be,

'he is love, he loves me as Jesus loves me'. The degree may not be the same but the quality must be identical. Disciples must prove to all men that they have love by loving as Jesus loves.

That is what the Lord wants; paraphrasing His words in an attempt to arrive at what He was really saying we may put it this way: 'I am going away and when I leave you, all of you will seek me because you want me. You will not be able to find me in the flesh, you will only find me in spirit and this only if you yourselves become love personified. Ask yourselves this question, when I am gone who is going to love Matthew as I have loved him? Who will take my place and love Peter as I do? Will you Philip? Will you John? Will you James be to Thaddeus who and what I have been to him? Will you? Will each one of you rise to this, his highest privilege and

love as I have loved and shall always love every one of you?' Beloved there is nothing higher or greater than this, nothing in heaven or earth, and there is no true discipleship other than this, it is sainthood. This is a much higher calling than to following — it is a promotion by regeneration to being, and that being — Love.

It is very noticeable that the whole tenor of the Lord's teaching changed from the moment He entered that upper room with His disciples. It is as if He took His last opportunity to say things which must be said, things He had been wanting to say and had delayed until now. We know from Luke that He had 'desired with desire' to eat those last meals with them; He had timed events and words to perfection, so that the great significance of the occasion and His

words should never be lost upon His disciples. They sang a hymn together and then He spoke what were perhaps His very last words to them before their departure, 'Hereafter I will not talk much with you for the prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father and as the Father gave me commandment even so I do. Arise let us go hence'; and away they went. He knew that just beyond Him now lay Gethsemane and betrayal and apprehension and imprisonment and crucifixion; that is why He went; He loved His Father.

And as He went He continued with His unfinished teaching to His disciples, telling them vital things they must know about discipleship — things He had not been able to say to them before. They realised that a great change was taking place, He was doing

unusual things, saying new things; He had just spoken to them about His Father's house and about the Comforter the Holy Spirit coming to live in them, and He said that He Himself and the Father would come too. He had never said those things before. These were His last words and they listened distressed and mystified and amazed in the darkness of the night as He poured it into their ears. It was new truth. It was all about being His disciples, and as they listened they realised He was developing and explaining what He had been saying earlier in the guest-chamber at the supper, 'This is my commandment, this is what I meant when I said to you that you love one another as I have loved you', 'I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman; as the Father hath loved me even so have I loved you, continue ye in my love, love each other as I

have loved you. Love, this love I am talking about and have shown you, is eternal; I didn't start it, love didn't commence with me, I have only continued it. The Father has love me eternally; He continued loving me as a man on earth and I have simply continued it to you by continuing it in myself. I love the Father and He gave me commandment what I should do and what I should say and I am now doing what I do because I love Him. By so doing I am not only continuing in His love to me and mine to Him, but at the same time and by the same action am continuing it to you also and this is the only way it can be done. Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends and you disciples are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you, as I have done and am still

doing whatsoever my Father has commanded me.'

It all became plain to them after they were born again. John found no difficulty with it then. When he came to write it, the blessed baptism of Jesus had made it all feasible to his mind and workable in his life. He was speaking logical truth to them; spiritual truth is always logical and perfectly understandable, it was all a growth process, a progressive factor of life based upon Himself and His own relationship with His Father; as it was between Jesus and the Father, so must it be between Jesus and His disciples. He was not only talking about the coming death of the cross towards which He was moving all the time He was speaking though. When He said 'greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends', He was talking in retrospect

as well as in prospect; He had already laid down a life in heaven before He came to earth to befriend men and love them and make them His friends and God's sons.

Laying down His life was not new to Him. He had spoken of it before, 'the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep, the Father knoweth me, I know the Father and I lay down my life for the sheep. No man taketh it from me. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again; therefore doth my Father love me because I lay down my life for the sheep; this commandment have I received of my Father'. Laying down His life was natural and habitual to Him, His Father loved Him for it. It was not the originating cause of the Father's Love to Him but it was the reason for the continuation of it.

Every disciple must know with understanding that Jesus is speaking here of

the very essence of discipleship. Without this discipleship can no more exist than a branch can exist or bring forth fruit without abiding in the vine. This entails recognition of authority and the rendering of obedience and the resolve to lay down One's life. Every disciple must be obviously loved by his Father, as obviously loved as Jesus was; beholding him, people must be able to behold his glory, 'the glory as of an only begotten with a father', as John wrote of Jesus. When the life is manifest it is glory, whether in Jesus or in any other of God's sons. When a man has a son and he is his only son, indeed his only begotten child, that father lavishes his all upon him. John said as much, 'Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands and that He was come from God and went to God'. Jesus was very conscious of it and we see the

result of such consciousness — 'He rose from supper, took a towel and girded Himself, poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded'. He took the position and did the work of the most menial slave — He laid down His life yet more.

'Ye call me Master and Lord', He said, 'I am. The slave is not greater than His Lord, neither is He that is sent greater than He that sent Him'. He was speaking of Himself, and His Father was greater than He; He said so, greater than all. He was the disciples' Master and Lord but not His Father's; He was Father's bond-slave, therefore He found it no difficulty to become the disciples' slave, the truth was so real. What He did was a further step in the laying down of His life. 'I do not call you slaves', He said to the

disciples, 'I call you friends' my friends; He was their slave. There was no condescension about Him, He never patronised anybody or spoke patronisingly to anybody, He knew He was a slave, and at the end of His life could say 'I have given you an example — do as I have done'. All His life He had been an example to them — the only begotten of the Father in heaven became as an only begotten with a father on earth to be our example, our Master and our Lord.

A man must know his son-ship first though. No man can accept and follow His example until He first knows he is a son of the Father. To the statement 'Rabbi (Master, Teacher) we know that thou art a teacher come from God', comes the reply, direct and meaningful, 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born from above he cannot see the kingdom of God'. In the kingdom of

God, manifest on earth as a heavenly state, Jesus was a son and a slave, and a Lord and a servant. What happened in the upper room was an example, a demonstration of Jesus' lifelong practice; He did not suddenly become a slave then and there, He was a slave from the moment He left heaven. He laid down His life there first, before angels and archangels and His Father, and it is emblazoned on the sacred page for all who have eyes to see and a mind to read it. Let every man know that it takes all of a man to be a disciple, Jesus' whole life and total example being the proof of it. He did not tell them this immediately He called them, but it was not long before He commenced to teach them all the truth, and as they followed Him they saw it.

9. In the Judgement Hall.

It is said that comparisons are odious and Paul says that they who compare themselves among themselves are unwise. For the greater part and in certain circumstances both these statements are true, but sometimes comparison is inevitable and can be very profitable. The Spirit of God sets this so very firmly before us toward the end of this Gospel that comparison is almost unavoidably thrust upon us even if we would wish to refrain from it. It concerns John and Peter in the Judgement Hall of the High Priest. They had come there in the wake of Jesus. He had sought and had been granted permission from the captain of the band which came and arrested Him in the garden for His disciples to be allowed to leave in freedom, which they all did. They all forsook

Him and fled; how far they ran is not disclosed. Some fled away entirely, but Peter and John only fled to a safe distance from which they could keep everything under surveillance; when captors and captive moved off to the city they followed at a discreet distance. They knew what was afoot, Jesus had said one of the disciples would betray Him and they had heard and seen how He had exposed Judas and despatched him on his treacherous errand. They also recognised the type of men who had come to arrest Jesus; they were not the Roman guard, they were the Pharisees' and chief priest's thugs; Jesus was being taken to the high priest.

By the time the band reached Annas' palace things had been resolved between the two disciples, whatever the content of their conversation they both wanted to be in that

palace and witness what went on. John was known to Annas and must have wondered how things would go with him, but he determined that, despite his fears about possible consequences, he was going to use the old acquaintanceship to get in. So by the time Jesus reached the entrance John caught up with Him and went in with Him, noticed but unchallenged; but not Peter. Dear John, what a loyal soul he was. He had heard the Lord say He was going to be crucified, so he could have entertained little doubt about the result of His capture, and his own association with Him was too well-known to deny if he had wished to. But the love that existed between them was so great that, despite possible danger to himself, he approached the door-maid and declared himself to her and requested Peter's

admission to the proceedings also, which was granted.

What contact beyond that the two disciples had within the Judgement Hall cannot be established, but it is pretty apparent that Peter, from the moment of his entry, sought to become an anonymous observer only.

Unlike John he had no intention of identifying himself for what he was — he wished to see and remain unseen, but it was not to be. Poor Peter, who can tell what he thought and felt? Fears and apprehensions gripped him; fighting with loyalty and a sense of duty to Jesus and John, he could not identify with either of them and tried to hide himself among the soldiers standing round the fire. Failing to identify with the Lord and his faithful fellow-disciple he identified with the enemy — it was inevitable, and so was what followed. The

door-maid came to him and said, 'thou art one of His disciples'. Immediately he denied it; once he said, 'I know not the man', and another time he denied Him with an oath; it was categorical and effectual.

The cock crowed. Perhaps it declared the day of crucifixion was at hand; certainly it announced to Christ that He had been denied as well as betrayed by an apostle. Perhaps it also heralded the dawn of Peter's salvation — Jesus turned and looked on Peter and Peter went out and wept bitterly, a broken man, his heart full of sorrow, his mind surging with uncontrollable thoughts; what had he done? Memories of recent events flooded him, breaking through the dam of the frightful fear that had so effectually held back Love's fear — that fear of God which sustained his brother John, keeping him loyal to Christ and free from the

fear of man. John had not been afraid to let everybody know to whom he belonged: he loved Jesus and remained true to Him and His call: love is stronger than death or the threat of it. What he thought when the cock crowed he does not say — he too was a disciple and had been in the upper room. True he had fled with all the others at first when Jesus was apprehended; the whole incident had been such a shock to everybody, but he had speedily recovered; love had won. He knew it was not his to judge his fellow-disciple; Jesus did all that was necessary with a look that only Peter caught.

So much was in that look, far more than could possibly be pressed into words; it revealed Jesus' heart and uncovered Peter's, breaking it open deep and wide till remorse flooded him. Where his attestations of love

and devotion now? Where his declarations of loyalty, his martyr spirit, his longings to be washed all over and have part with his Lord and Master? What had he done? Had his discipleship been outward only after all? Perhaps he had spoken the truth when he had denied he was a disciple of Jesus and said 'I know not the man'; truer than he knew or had intended. Did any of them know Him? Jesus did not seem to think so and had said as much to Philip in the upper room. 'Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me?' Who among them really knew this man? No-one seemed to know Him; before long Pilate was to put the question to Him, 'Whence art thou?' But Jesus gave him no answer.

Pilate wrote a title for Him and put it on the cross. It was Pilate's conclusion about Him, 'Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews'. It

was a short-sighted assessment of Him, correct as far as he could see. Pilate could not evaluate Him aright, he could not be expected to do so, but he had never been one of His disciples, while Peter had been proud to call himself one. What was he now? He had not caught men, men had caught him. He could recall the words of Jesus, 'Satan hath desired to have thee that he may sift thee as wheat, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not'. Was Jesus still praying for him? He was at the end; where could he go? What could he do? Nothing! Peter was in the devil's riddle, being tossed and turned and shaken and Jesus was content to leave him there. He was confident, He knew that underneath all Peter was wheat: His Father had given him to Him, he was His, a family gift to Him. Nothing satan did to the disciple could alter

that, he was in His hand; all the devil could do could only rid him of the husk and the chaff and in the end prove him genuine.

The Lord knew that. There is no other way for a disciple whoever he is — to some degree he must be sifted as wheat as Peter was; every principle of righteousness must be fulfilled in him. If Peter had been in a fit state to do so he could have rested in his sore distress, knowing that in one sense in measure the things that were being fulfilled in him were being worked out in his Lord and Master also. Jesus was the great corn of wheat and who could doubt that at the same time as Peter He was in the sieve also? Not for the same reasons as Peter though. The disciple had sin in him — Jesus had none, but they were both in the sieve. What was taking place in Peter was a modified illustration of the judgement Paul later

passed upon a believer in Corinth, 'In the name of our Lord Jesus deliver such a one unto satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus'. There is no comparison between Peter and that unnamed man, and 'the days' were different, but the element of truth is the same: God wanted some things in them dealt with and rid from them, so they both had to go into the riddle.

Dear Peter, chosen of the Lord, gift of the Father, disciple, apostle and friend of Jesus, who had accompanied his Lord into glory and was first promised the keys of the kingdom; he who had preached the gospel, healed the sick, cast out devils and was first named among his companions, oft-times their leader and spokesman, a man with great potential and ability, whose future in the kingdom of God seemed absolutely

assured — this mighty man needed to be put in the sieve and stripped. Was not the Lord stripped of everything, cruelly stripped and hanged on a tree? So do we all need stripping. Jesus was stripped and beaten, clothed and mocked, stripped and hanged, clothed and buried; even His body was as a husk — He was as a corn of wheat. When at last He died He had passed through the hands of men and the sieve of satan in the hands of God and had fallen into the ground and died. As with Jesus, so with all His disciples, though to a lesser degree and for different specific reasons under many varieties of circumstances, the end in view is the same — we all must be stripped of the husk.

Because Peter was so great a man and a companion of Jesus he is prominent in scripture, but the record of his life and

activities has not been given to us so we may blame him for his mistakes and failures. It is there for us to read and learn from it in all humility. In company with the great apostle we all have to learn Christ, and in order to do so we have to learn ourselves. An old chorus springs to mind: 'Make the Book live to me dear Lord, make the Book live to me, show me myself and show me my Saviour and make the Book live to me'. The man who taught it me said his favourite verse was 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me', and at times adapted Stephen's word about Israel to himself, 'forty years suffered He their manners in the wilderness'. When Paul saw himself he said he was a wretched man needing deliverance, others saw him as a dragon breathing out threatenings and slaughter; he said he was a blasphemous

murderer. When he discovered Jesus he discovered himself also, so did Peter, so do we all, and like them we must let Him put us in the sieve that everything unlike Him may be shaken off us.

God's dealings with us may at times be very severe and sometimes just as obscure, we may not always understand why things happen the way they do; does He allow satan to have his way with us and sift us as wheat as seemed to happen to Peter?

Maybe if a man is destined to become a foundational apostle it will be necessary, but if that is the reason for such drastic measures most of us may expect less harsh treatment. Nevertheless all true disciples must be mentally prepared for some such test, so that when it comes we may not be like the man who replies against God. Peter uses an apt phrase, 'arm yourselves with the

same mind' and goes on to say, 'he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin'. That is always the objective when God deals with a man and in the end, if not at first, all His disciple/saints confess how kind He is to deal with them so. Let all who feel themselves to be in the riddle (whether rightly or wrongly) comfort themselves with these words of Jesus to Peter, 'I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not'.

Let us all notice too that Jesus did not say, 'that thy strength fail not'; He wanted Peter's strength to fail, that was the precise reason for the sifting, Peter was a strong personality, too strong altogether; he had to be broken. Lots of things needed sifting away from him, natural things such as self-confidence, egotism, boastfulness, self-opinion, over-hastiness, cowardliness, pride — pride of position and possessions and so

much more. When these all are compounded with sin in a disciple they amount to a fearsome image of old Adam and the principle of them is in us all till the Lord deals with it and them and us, even the very best of us. The transition from mere discipleship to sainthood is very real in a man's life and very radical.

As Peter is an illustration of the vulgar and distasteful things of natural man we all despise, so John the beloved exemplifies much that is admirable and desirable.

Whatever he felt like within when his friend Peter was identified as a disciple in the Judgement Hall we cannot certainly know, but we may guess much. His feelings are not disclosed but his actions cannot be misinterpreted. He was known for what he was, a disciple and apostle of Jesus and that is how he wanted it to be; throughout the

entire proceedings he remained with his Lord, as near as it was possible to be.

Possibly Mary stood with him too, watching and listening while her precious son was so treacherously denied. Betrayal seemed to be natural to these men; Judas had betrayed Him into the hand of sinners and bears the name of Traitor, but is not denial a form of betrayal? Had not Peter also betrayed the Lord's trust? Only John seemed true and loyal. She was grateful to John; he loved her precious Jesus as much as she did, but where were all those others He had chosen who had sworn allegiance to Him and had left all to follow Him? Those He had called His mother and sister and brother, where were they now? Hiding, looking after their own skin. Peter had at least tried and John stood with her; would he stay to the end?

10. A Place Called Calvary.

Who could have blamed Mary if she was bitter? She was hurt, very hurt. She saw her son's helplessness, so did John, and neither of them knew what was going on. They followed with the crowd who followed Jesus to the cross, loyal to the last. They could not forsake Him even in His death throes: bravely they went and stood by the cross, as close to Him as they possibly could, so that Jesus in His agony could see them, and He spoke to them, 'Mother behold thy son' He said, and 'Son behold thy mother'. If Mary had been asked she would not have chosen another, and John felt he could not have been given a greater privilege. His mother: It was such an honour; John felt he was being asked by Jesus to take His place. Was he to be to Mary what Jesus had been to her? He

knew he could not possibly be that to her, but from that moment he took her to himself and after the day was through he took her to his home also. But not yet, he would not leave his Lord even when He cried out in His God-forsakenness though all forsook Him he would stay; what a true disciple he was.

John had been in that upper room when Peter had said. to Jesus, 'though all men shall be offended because of thee yet will I never be offended'. Peter was not alone in this, for each one of the disciples had also added his own firm attestations of loyalty to Christ, even unto the death, John with them; perhaps they all had meant it, but when it came to it he was the only one who kept his word. This is probably the reason why he begins his Gospel on this note, 'In the beginning was the word, and the word was

with God and the word was God: the same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made'. Not that standing by the cross he understood anything much; he was probably numb with grief and too overcome to speak one word of comfort to his new 'mother' when the last indignity was heaped upon their loved one in death. A soldier thrust his spear into Jesus' side 'and forthwith came there out blood and water', and John knew he had witnessed something vital; what it was he wasn't sure.

Later he understood it to be all part of the great revelation of new birth, a secret revealed only to the few. His faithfulness at the cross earned him a vast reward, though at the time he had no thought of the future, only purpose of heart to be true to Jesus at

all costs. Jesus was the Word: it was always like that with God: it all begins with the word, it did in creation, it did at the incarnation and it did with John. He said he would be faithful to the death and he was. He went to the Judgement Hall with that intention, he was well-known there as a disciple of Jesus; metaphorically speaking, for Jesus' sake he put his head into the lion's mouth that day. John was a wonderful man, a true disciple of an even more wonderful man, who gave him a most wonderful reward — the ability and authority to write the most wonderful of all Gospels and the account of the end of all time. Such is the reward of faithfulness in a disciple who desires to remain anonymous, or else only to be known as the disciple who Jesus loved. There are certain sections of scripture that are favourites with us all, they enjoy world-

wide popularity among Christians and deservedly so. Everywhere they are memorised or quoted or preached on, to the blessing and salvation of millions of souls. Because this is so it is inevitable that other portions of scripture suffer neglect, and for no other reason than the popularity of the more well-known portions. The Gospel of John has suffered very much by this. Although it is so well-loved among us, there are some chapters which are far more popular than others, consequently their truths and teachings find more frequent exposition from pulpits. By reason of this they become better known than the less-favoured passages, though these are of equal inspiration and truth with them and flow from the same pen. In some instances this neglect has done almost irreparable harm, for the loss sustained by the churches

is incalculable and has had tremendous detrimental effect; in no area has it wreaked more havoc than in this area of discipleship.

As we have seen, discipleship is a life, not an affectation. It is something I have to learn from Jesus and it cannot be learned by scholarship; it can only be learned by living.

By the Lord's definition discipleship is not only life, it is lifelong, demanding utmost dedication; there may be no reserves and no going back — we must not even consider looking back. In order to follow the Lord each disciple must be prepared to give up everything else, including creature comforts and chosen profession. The call of the Lord must take precedence over all other calls and be the prime cause and concern of the life. These are big demands and the Lord does not attempt to minimise or modify them in one degree. It is these demands that

make the soul realise who He is; no mere man has the right to make the claims He makes on a fellow human being. He makes them though, and He expects us to respond wholeheartedly because He is God. But the response is primarily to Him: He said 'I will draw all men unto me', He did not say He would draw them to His teachings — they were, as Peter's words testify, 'Lord to whom else can we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life'. As Jesus said, 'the words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit and life'; the way He lived, the life He lived in the flesh openly before men, was exactly the same as He thought within. His public and His private life — His open and His secret life — were the same. The life of true discipleship He Himself lived is the kind of life to which He calls us.

11. Bethesda — the Sheep Market.

Perhaps more clearly than in any other passage of scripture this life is revealed in the fifth chapter of John's Gospel. Generally only the opening section of this chapter is at all well-known; the rest of it is certainly less known, possibly altogether unknown to many. This is nothing less than a tragedy because into it John has incorporated some of the most basic principles of Jesus' life as a man on earth and as a disciple of God. Although He was the Son of God, He lived and walked with His Father as any son should live and walk with his father, and especially a son of God with the Father. By utter obedience and loving subservience to His God, the man Jesus lived and walked in complete harmony with His Father. He was the supreme example of a man given over to

a calling; He set the pattern of discipleship for every disciple for all time. We must therefore study Him as He is revealed in scripture and discover the principles upon which He built His life. Not that we should become mere devotees of principles, but because we must make sure we do not build on sand but on the rock.

As already said, the best known part of the chapter is the story of the healing of the impotent man — it is one of the miracles carefully selected by John for inclusion in his Gospel. The Lord performed so many wonderful works that John supposed and said that if every one of them had been recorded the world would not be able to contain the amount of books that would be written. This may seem a tremendous, even an exaggerated statement, and seeing there are so many wonderful works there must be

some significant reason for the fact that he only selects and chooses to write about a few. There is! All the Lord's miraculous works recorded by John are signs, they were all done by the Lord with that intention and John records them for this reason, deliberately omitting many thousands of other works and miracles. These signs were given so that serious-minded people seeking truth could observe them and by them discover reality. For instance the sign which most readily points out to the unprejudiced heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is the giving of sight to the man born blind. By it he, if no-one else, was led out of the darkness of uncertainty to the conviction that the Jesus who gave him sight was the Son of God; the miracle was the sign. The man had seen nothing all his life and then,

through the miracle, he saw who Jesus was; the physical miracle was the sign to him.

Each sign from the first to the last is intended by John to be a progressive step in a growing understanding of the person of Christ. He gave them one by one and one upon another in progressive self-revelation, which to the unbiased mind presents irrefutable evidence that Jesus is indeed who He claims to be, the Christ of God. Each sign points out a particular and distinctive truth about Him; the miracle involved was specially wrought with that in mind.

Whether or not Christ used the miracle as the starting-point for a discourse, these works are really parabolic texts; certainly in the case of the feeding of the multitudes Christ created the sign and then from it proceeded to teach His truth. What a superb teacher He was; no wonder Nicodemus said

'Rabbi we know thou art a teacher come from God'. This complimentary confession was made and paid to Jesus because of the miracles; to Nicodemus they were clear indications that Jesus was come from God. When a man recognises that he makes a good start, but it is insufficient for salvation. Signs are good and acceptance of them only sensible, but much more than those and that are required of God for regeneration. The company that lay around the pool of Bethesda in the sheep-market that day in Jerusalem are variously described as blind, halt, withered, diseased, infirm; the adjective that John uses to describe them collectively is impotent. However their particular need or disease was categorised — they were all powerless. Also they were all hopefully looking for divine healing through an angel. Only one of them could

expect to be healed though, according to local legend it was the first one into the pool when the water was troubled; none of the others could expect it. John does not comment on this belief; he neither confirms it to be true nor dismisses it as superstition, neither does Jesus say anything about it; only the background situation and the people's belief are sketched in. The main reason for the supply of this detail is in itself part of the sign; everybody gathered there was expecting: (1) a miracle to happen; (2) a visit by a heavenly person; (3) only one person to be healed and no-one else. Into this situation came Jesus that momentous day with the intention of using popular belief, turning it to God's glory and forcing people to face truth and make decisions about Him.

Other outstanding things, too important to miss, though not so vital to the main issue, are worthy of notice: Bethesda was a sheep-market having five porches — the name means 'house of loving-kindness' — and five is the number of grace. The analogy is so obvious that it would be foolish to ignore it: Bethesda was to be God's house that day, in loving-kindness (or grace) the Good Shepherd was going to move among the flock in blessing; He was looking for faith. He paused by one man who for thirty eight years had been stricken with an infirmity which had left him without strength and made him entirely dependent upon other people for help. Year after year he had come to the pool hoping that one day some strong man would take pity on him and put him into the waters before anyone else could steal the blessing — but all to no avail. His

cry was, 'I have no man'; he did not know the man who stood and looked at him, but he must have hoped that this stranger was heaven-sent and that at last the helper he needed had come. Jesus said to him. 'Wilt thou be made whole?' He could not say 'yes', his helplessness had bred in him a fatalism built upon thirty eight years of disappointment and disillusionment. But Jesus heard his cry and felt his infirmity. 'Rise, take up thy bed and walk', He said, 'and immediately the man was made whole and took up his bed and walked'. It was the sabbath day; he could hardly have done a worse thing.

Presumably if he had been healed by the angel in the pool it may not have been such a sin to carry his bed home, or perhaps the whole sick company would have been supervised by Pharisees, in which case they

would have reminded the fortunate person that he must not carry his bed even though he was healed. But Jesus told him to take up his bed and walk. It was a deliberate move on the Lord's part calculated to stir up the Pharisees to anger and draw attention to Himself and the miracle, and it had the desired effect. It was a sign spoken against, though why men should speak against it is more than any sensible person can fully understand. By it the Lord was showing that the expected heavenly visitation had indeed taken place, that a miracle had happened and a man had been healed — moreover he was made whole and strong and able to walk. He was a sample of His handiwork and an example of discipleship for all to see. He was also the symbol of an assault upon tradition without power and religion without heart; more than that, he was the living

proof that when God decides to give a sign He seldom requires man's faith in order to accomplish it.

It is very important for us to grasp this. It may be contrary to man's beliefs and teachings, but it is nevertheless true and this miracle is an instance of it. The man was not required to believe anything; in fact his words to the Lord reveal despair rather than faith. When the Lord said, 'wilt thou be made whole?' he might as well have said, 'No I won't', for he had no expectation of it, and if faith is anything it is a holy expectation grounded upon reality. The best he had was hope and desire and perhaps a genuine looking toward God. The fact that afterwards he went to the temple suggests that he was a God-fearing person and that probably he had gone there to give thanks to God for his healing, but it is certain that at

Bethesda he had no faith, nor was he required to have any, nor was he forced to believe that the man who healed him was the Lord — he did not even know who he was or that his name was Jesus. The truth is that God was giving a sign and the only faith involved in it was His alone. Quite often the Lord required people to exercise faith as a condition for healing, but when He gives signs, even though they embrace healing for some person, He just does them by His own power for His own purposes — man's faith is not required. We are required to believe that.

This man's story is included by the Spirit speaking through John so that we may see the expectations of the Lord for His disciples, but good and necessary as it is that by His grace and power we should be made whole and strong and upright, and that we should

walk abroad for all to see, it is not enough. The Lord planned a further visit to him to complete the meaning of the sign to the man. So when he went to the temple He also went and found him there. 'Go and sin no more lest a worse thing befall thee', He said to him; that is all. He did not disclose Himself or His name to the man; He just told him not to sin ever again; that was sufficient. The nameless man could then put a name to the person who had healed him and he went away and told the Pharisees that his benefactor was Jesus. It was the sin issue that decided it — the command to cease sinning could only come from Jesus — no-one else said such things. From this sign disciples must learn and believe that sin is not allowed by the Lord; it is banned, outlawed. If we are made whole and able to walk we must stop sinning.

This is a high standard indeed. But what else should we expect from Jesus, of whom it was said that He beareth away the sin of the world, and who said, 'Ye must be born from on high'? The people at Bethesda had expected a visitation from an angel from on high to heal them and they would have expected him to be sinless. Instead they were visited by the very God of heaven, the Man from on high; could we expect Him to be less than sinless in Himself, or that His requirements of men should be less than His own human sinlessness? If He had offered less than that He would have been less than God. By the same token, having freely provided it for us He would not have been honest if He had not required and commanded it of us; every disciple must face up to this. The fact of the matter is that Jesus' expectations of disciples is based

upon His own spiritual life. He laid down His life that all the disciples may have it, and it is of this life, His life in us, that He makes all His demands.

He expects nothing but sin and total failure of a man in his first spiritual state, but when by virtue of the indwelling Spirit a man is made a saint, the Lord expects the life of Christ to be manifest; there is not a better section than this in the whole of scripture for revealing what that means. The man Jesus is revealed here in all His glory, largely by His own words, His inward states and the principles from which His life sprang and flowed and found expression in His daily words and works. It all started when the Jews sought to kill Him because He had done His works on the sabbath day; not only that, for the first time He made the claim that God was His Father. When they heard that

they said He was claiming to be equal with God. They were right of course. What they did not know was that this man did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped at but on the contrary had humbled Himself to be equal with man. This amazing Man was just speaking truth. He was unique of course; no other man has ever been able to claim equality with God, but although this is so, every one who becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ must become a son of God or else all attempts at discipleship must fail. Even if Jesus Himself were to become re-incarnate and grow up into manhood and go about on earth again calling men to discipleship, we all, as they of old, would fail Him utterly. This is why He told us we must be born again.

Just as Jesus had to be humanly born in order to become a human being and learn to

be the Son of man, so we need to be born of God in order to be a divine being and learn to be a true son of God. His discipleship lay in being the Son of God and yet learning to be and act as a son of man; our discipleship lies in being a son of man learning to be a son of God. He was the Son of God being the Son of Man; each one of us is a son of man being a son of God. Every disciple must be clear about this. The name Christian has largely lost its meaning now, so much goes under that name. These days a man can call himself a Christian while living as he pleases in the world and get away with anything; but let men call themselves the sons of God and immediately everything is changed. A man with that confession cannot live to please himself in this world; self-indulgence is recognised and denounced for the sin it is,

and self-denial becomes the normal state of life as Jesus said it should.

The regenerate man never claims equality with God — he has no desire for that; on the contrary he has renounced all pride of position, self-ambition has gone; he knows he must seek nothing for himself, self must be humbled voluntarily. One of the most amazing statements Christ ever made was, 'verily, verily I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of Himself but what he seeth the Father do'. It is a tremendously solemnising realisation that no-one should attempt to do anything except he or she is shown by the Father to do it. Before Jesus attempted to do anything, He waited until He saw the Father do it first; He never initiated anything. This does not mean that He was powerless of Himself to do anything; on the contrary He was all-powerful, so He did not say He could

do nothing of Himself. He said He could do nothing of Himself except the Father showed Him, which is different from suggesting that He was useless. It is the word 'except' which makes everything clear. He used it when talking about the vine, 'As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me'. The branch has to bear fruit of itself; it cannot bear the fruit of another branch, but it must bear its own fruit; it must not only bring it forth, it must also bear what it brings forth — as Jesus said, 'Your fruit should remain'. He also said 'If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you, so shall ye bring forth much fruit; herein is my Father glorified that ye bring forth much fruit, so shall all men know ye are my disciples'.

There is no fruit-bearing except by abiding and there is no abiding apart from conscious communion, not only Himself but His words also must abide in us, evoking prayer in us along the line of His words spoken in us. Fruit-bearing is the result of prayer based on this communion which begins from the moment we abide in Him in us. Fruit is the expression of this communion. He instigates it. Jesus once said to His disciples, 'I have many things to say unto you but ye cannot bear them now', He knew it would have been fruitless to have said those things to them then; they could not at that time have borne them out into fruit. What He says must bring forth and bear fruit in us in the same way as what His Father said to Him brought forth and bore and still bears fruit in Him. His fruit remains because He abode in and was one with His Father, but He was

quick to disclaim originality for any of the works He did, nor did He claim authorship for anything He said. He sought no glory for Himself from any of these, He initiated nothing; that is how He did such mighty works and spoke such glorious things.

Disciples ignore this principle of divine life and ministry to their own cost and dreadful loss. He is a brave man who claims God as his Father and then refuses to do anything except his Father shows him; there are very few men of this calibre around in these days. There is much talk of authority abroad in the land — men who would be disciples are being taught to do what pastors and preachers and elders tell them; few are being told to do anything God says, except it first be spoken to them by an apostle or a prophet or a pastor or a teacher or an elder — so greatly is the Holy Spirit being

demeaned by many who claim to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Disciples need disciplining from others occasionally, but not by infringement upon their liberties in Christ. Every man of God is free in God and bound by Him to hold the Head directly, not by proxy or through a chain of other men. Men are in bondage to other men only when they forfeit their right to liberty by ceasing to be dependent entirely on God, as Jesus was. Such dependence as this creates interdependence of the correct order among His disciples and usurps no man's independent rights to see and hear from God for himself directly.

This is not uniquely possible with us as it was with Jesus, but that need not prevent us from learning from Him. His marvellous deportment of Himself at Bethesda's pool is a perfect lesson of this dependence,

interdependence and independence. It is also the most convincing proof of His humble claim that He could do nothing but what the Father showed Him to do. The question may often have been asked, why did He only heal one man of the many hundreds who gathered that day with hope of healing? There were times when Jesus went to a city and healed all who had need of healing. Why should He withhold healing from multitudes in one place and freely give it to others somewhere else? The short answer is, because that is what His Father showed Him to do. At the sheep-market His Father showed Him to heal only one, therefore He restrained Himself from healing any more. He did not lose compassion for the multitudes, nor did He indulge in favouritism, but walked in obedience to His heavenly vision and opened ear. If He had

indulged Himself in a display of power then and sought to establish a reputation for Himself in men's estimation, He would have become proud and disobedient and utterly independent with the wrong kind of independence.

He depended upon His Father's wisdom and knowledge and guidance, He did not look to His own gifts or trust His own heart or seek to fulfil His own desires; therefore His Father knew He could depend upon Him and in this mutual trust of each other interdependence was born. Father depended upon Him, He knew that Father had given everything into His hands and likewise He depended upon His Father. He had given everything into the Father's hands. This is what made Him say, 'My Father is greater than all and no-one is able to pluck them (the sheep — remember Bethesda was the sheep-market) out of my

Father's hand; I and my Father are one'. He was in His Father's hand, He had consciously placed Himself there; it was the only place of eternal safety and man on earth as He was He felt secure; He needed to, because He had to act entirely independently of everybody else. This kind of correct, vigorous independence was strongly advocated by Mary to the servants, 'whatsoever He saith unto you do it'. It was tantamount to a recommendation to change lordship. Those servants were neither hers nor Jesus'; they were the servants of the household and of some other person, but she told them to act independently of other men's orders. Doing so they were instrumental in turning water into wine under Jesus' power and sovereignty. Independence of others enables us to act entirely in dependence upon God and to

enjoy the fellowship of independence with all those who do the same.

This kind of independence is not the result of pride, neither is it the arrogance bred of self-opinion; rightly practised it will always bring a sense of lowliness, that healthy kind of nothingness which assures the heart of greater things to come. Here it is in Christ's own words, 'the Father loveth the Son and showeth Him all things that Himself doeth and He will show Him greater works than these'. Jesus knew He was only at the beginning of things, that what He had seen was as nothing to be compared with what He would see. He perfectly understood that growth in stature and development of works go hand in hand and must take place in Him throughout all His human life. That is the way of God for all His children and for this reason He has included these things in

scripture that we, reading them, should refuse to accept any other standard of life and conduct than that set by our Lord Jesus. He lived it out perfectly and uniquely for over thirty years and people like John, who knew Him intimately for three or so years, at the end of his life set it down in writing for eager hearts to read and for living souls to assimilate.

Should the objection be raised that three years' observation by a man who was obviously a devotee is ground for laying claim to writing a life of Jesus Christ, the directions Jesus gave John at the cross should be taken into account. From that time onward Mary became his mother and John took her to his own home. This may be because Joseph's children, her other sons, were anti-Christ and hostile to the disciples; Jesus wished His mother to be cared for by

loving, loyal John and no longer exposed to harsh, cruel hearts. There may be other reasons too, but whatever they may have been makes no difference now; the point for us to notice is that this being so, who better than John had opportunity to find out all about the Lord from His conception to His death and resurrection? Mary knew Jesus for thirty years before John even attempted to write his Gospel. With such a source and such a researcher, both of whom loved Him and were filled with the Spirit of truth, there surely could not have been a better team found anywhere to compile a life of Christ. The amazing thing about it all is that John did not write any of the intimate details of Jesus' birth. His investigations convinced him that Jesus was the original Word, God's everlasting statement and final instructions to men, and that is where all begins and

ends; hence the force and reliability of his Gospel.

John loved to remember and record such words as 'I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear I judge: and my judgement is just because I seek not mine own will but the will of Him that sent me'. Not only did Jesus see what He was shown, He also heard what He was told. He had the Father's complete confidence. He saw and heard men and events and was therefore as able as any to form opinions and give judgements, but above and through all He saw and heard His Father. This of itself might be thought to be sufficient ground for claiming His judgements to be true, but He did not rely upon that. He knew that it requires more than that to guarantee correct human judgements, and He stated what it was: 'I seek not mine own will, but the will of the

Father'. A disciple is a man who has given up all desire to have his own way and seek his own will. He has a will, but discipleship is not a life of self-discovery by assertion of the will. It is a life of seeking Father's will in all. To be a saint of God requires the renunciation of self-will; if we do not seek the will of him who sent us we shall not do the works of Him who sent us. In fact unless we do His will he has not sent us.

Perhaps what is more important than this is the fact that unless a man is broken from self-will he cannot but seek it, even though he professes to be seeking God's. This means his judgements are worthless; they cannot be just. If a man bears witness of (from) himself his witness is not true, he must bear witness from God in order to speak truth and he cannot do that unless he hears from God. Judgements made in the

affairs of men in relationship to the kingdom of God are not worth the breath by which they are spoken if these basic things are ignored. This was so true of Jesus that Father committed all judgement to Him, and we should honour Him so much that we should take Him as our example; He is the Word of God to us about life, every aspect of it.

Let us learn of Him in the matter of men's testimony. We need to do so, for we do so like people to speak well of us. These days we do not speak of testimony but of testimonials, reports, references or recommendations. All these ideas and meanings are included in what the Lord here says when referring to John Baptist, 'ye sent unto John and he bare witness unto the truth, but I receive not testimony from man'. It is so natural to desire the good opinions of

others; nobody wishes to be ill-spoken of by another. All that John ever said about Jesus was good and true, it was not flattery but sincere testimony to His superiority and to deity. The Jews' actions seem to prove that they did not receive it, but whatever their opinions about Himself or John, the Lord did not receive his testimony. Such a strong stand as this may at first seem strange. After all everything John said about Him was true; why should it not be received? Jesus did not say it should not be received by man, He said He did not receive it, which is a totally different thing. It should have been received by men — that is why it was given — but it was not given for Jesus. It was given for the sake of men; He did not need it, neither should any son of God..

Complimentary testimonials or commendations can be destructive of

spiritual life; none knew better than Jesus. It is nice to have complimentary things said about you, but if we are not careful these can become the bread of a life that is not the life of God in a man. Jesus refused them, they gender to pride. We may think that compliment is better than criticism and much to be preferred, but better criticism than compliment, for pride cannot feed on it. However, the disciple of Christ must learn to receive neither, though they both be given, and for the same reason that the Lord refused them, namely this: He did not need men's testimonies. He knew in Himself who He was and He lived in unbroken communion with the Father who showed Him all the things He needed to know. There were four that bore witness of Him — the Father, the scriptures of truth, the works He did and the Holy Spirit, whose shape He and

John Baptist had seen at Jordan. These were the sources of His confidence; they were all the witness He needed, and in measure every disciple must have them also; without them no man can possibly be a disciple of Christ.

Beside this fourfold testimony and allied to it there is something else we all must be made aware of: the disciple must not receive honour from men. He may not covet this world's honours nor should he receive them if they are offered him, though they be thrust upon him he should reject them. A man should seek the honour that comes from God alone and not attempt to deceive himself and others by calling men's honours God's honours. We must remember that, though Christ was popular for a while, when His message and claims were finally understood He was despised and rejected of

men, cast out and crucified; He is our example, and this is why He said we must take up the cross daily and follow Him. He made the cross on which He finalised His life the symbol of discipleship for all our life; there is nothing contradictory in this because, although in the nature of things He could not hang on the cross until the end, He bore the cross without flinching all His days.

We all ought to be praising God for such straight sayings as these, for they are as the essence of life. We may think this approach to human life most exacting and the standard far too high, but the Lord's very words make it all plain, 'I know that ye have not the love of God in you'. That is a terrible indictment and we cannot fail to see the implication of it: people seek honour from men because they have not the love of God

in them. The inference is that the God and Father of Jesus does not love worldly, fleshly honour, so for that reason Jesus never sought it. That love in a man that makes him love this world's honours and favours is not the love of God, neither can a man seek worldly honours in any field and claim thereby he is loving God. He may profess that by it he is showing his love toward God, but as long as this word of Christ stands his profession is in vain. All such things are of self-love, God is brought no honour by them, neither is He seeking any honour from them. All true disciples need to take these things to heart, for there is much erroneous teaching being propagated these days under the pretext of kingdom truth and related themes which is in flat contradiction to this word of Christ. These errors are presented as sound Biblical truths, but anything not based upon

all Christ's words and personal example is not sound. One good test to apply to all such doctrines is whether they are taught in a futurist context or appositely based upon old covenant concepts. We are living in the 'now' of God, Christ is the Word and that Word was made flesh and that manifestation is the law of life. John understood that perfectly: 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us The life was manifested and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested unto us'. Jesus was that life, He is the manifestation, incarnation,

demonstration, example and ensample of it; either we confess that Jesus Christ is now come in the flesh or we do not. If we do, then we must demonstrate that fact for all to see and hear and handle; He never sought or received honour from any man, but only from God.

From the very beginning of His ministry to the very end He displayed total disinterest in praise and honour from men for anything. When the governor of the feast in Cana of Galilee praised and congratulated the bridegroom for the superb wine he served last, the Lord let him have the glory for it. He sought no honour or glory that day or any other day. He came to this earth as the servant of God, He only did what He was told; somehow He felt He did not deserve any thanks. On another occasion the multitude wanted to make Him king of the

nation and when He refused to be persuaded they even went as far as to try and force Him to take the throne, but He would have none of it. He had no ambitions in that direction whatever; earthly positions and the possessions that went with them He despised and called His disciples away from them for they have no part in the kingdom of God. When the Holy Spirit came He also led the church to give away, sell, leave possessions and share what they had, and all this in the light of the Lord's return. All other practice contrary to that binds people to this world.

The amount of one person's commitment to another or to a cause is often measurable by the degree of anonymity he is prepared to accept in order that the other person or cause may be exalted or propagated as the case may be. John is an outstanding example

of this, calling himself 'the disciple whom Jesus loved', rather than using his own name. He learned and published the secret of the Lord and it is sublime; here it is — 'I am come in my Father's name'. All disciples must learn this heavenly secret, God expects us so to live Christ's life that we should bear His name, that is be and live in it, and only come or go in it. That is how it was with Jesus; He could not be His Father's Son and God's servant in His own name. He bore the name of Jesus, it was given Him and it was His; it was a common enough name for boys in His day. He was Jesus of Nazareth, but there may have been other boys called Jesus in Nazareth as well; there would almost certainly have been a Jesus of Capernaum and a Jesus of Bethany and perhaps a Jesus of every other village and town in Palestine

also, just as there would have been plenty of Johns and Jameses and Marys and Marthas. Nevertheless Jesus of Nazareth was unique, for John was not John of Capernaum, neither was Peter known as Peter of Capernaum; John was of Zebedee and Peter was of Jona, their fathers whom everybody knew; but Jesus was not Jesus of the Joseph everybody knew, He was Jesus of Nazareth. So, although He bore the name in common with many others, it was different; His Father named Him but He could not be called the Son of His Father as others could be called the son of their father, so He was called Jesus of Nazareth. He was the son of an unknown father. He became known to the majority as one of Joseph's children and was popularly thought of as that. There were those who questioned that however, and rather than accept His deity, maliciously

taunted Him with such sayings as 'we were not born of fornication', plainly implying that He was. At another time they said, 'say we not well that thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil?' allowing the inference that Mary had committed fornication with an unknown Samaritan and that Jesus was the child of that union. But both Mary and Joseph bore all the misinterpretations and lies and unbelief of Jewry unprotestingly and Jesus lived on in His Father's name unperturbed; He had to fulfil His name because it was His Father's name for Him.

Jehovah, the God and Father of the nation of Israel, was also the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who of all people was the Israelite indeed. Jesus once said of Nathaniel that he was an Israelite indeed, but like Peter, his brother apostle, he was of an earthly father; this man became a disciple

and followed Jesus of Nazareth for many years because he recognised Him as the Israelite indeed and he actually called Him the king of Israel; He was. This recognition and confession reveals one of the great mistakes Pilate made about Him when he wrote the title he gave Him in the accusation he placed above His head on the cross, 'This is Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews'. Pilate was quite wrong; to have been correct he should have written, 'This is Jesus of Nazareth the king of Israel', but then any title written by a man as a superscription about Jesus would be totally inadequate, revealing more by omission than by inclusion. 'Join all the glorious names of wisdom, love and power that mortals ever knew, that angels ever bore, all are too mean to tell His worth, too mean to set my Saviour forth' Yet the simple name Jesus

declares it all, for it was all included in the person of the Man who bore it.

By definition Jesus means 'Jehovah's Saviour'; it is an adaptation of the Hebrew name 'Joshua', more properly Jehoshua, Jehovah's Saviour. The fact that Jehovah was Israel's Saviour had been kept before the minds of Israel since they had been formed a nation. That particular name of God. was introduced to them by Him through Moses when He redeemed them from Egypt and entered into covenant with them at Sinai; Jehovah is the covenant-making, covenant-keeping God. Isaiah was especially strong on the name and in his prophecy wrote much about God's redemption and salvation; so much so that at times, by some, his book is called 'the Gospel according to Isaiah', because it is replete with prophetic references to the birth and life and death of

Israel's Servant Saviour, Jehovah. Nobody at that time thought that Jehovah would beget a Son on earth and call Him 'Jehovah's Saviour', or that He would bear His Father's name with reference to and special emphasis upon redemption and salvation, but it was all written in the book. Just before His birth an angel brought this particular name of God from Jehovah the Father to both Mary and Joseph that they should give it to Jehovah the Son in a modified form, 'Thou shalt call His name Jesus'; they did and He became known among men as Jesus of Nazareth.

It was His Father's name, He had inherited it and Jesus knew this; He knew what honour He had received when He received that most excellent name from God. The Father had life in Himself and He had given to the human Son to have life in Himself and the

Father did so in order that all men should honour the Son as they honoured the Father. He committed all things into the hands of the Son without reservation and He, knowing the name He bore and the responsibility that was placed upon Him thereby, sought only to live in His Father's name. As He said, He came in His Father's name; by that He meant that He had come and was living among men as Jehovah, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father', He said, 'I and my Father are one'. When He said that men said He blasphemed; He knew He was telling the truth, 'I am the truth', He told them, but they did not believe Him. When men come in their own name their fellow-creatures accept them, but when they come in another's name they have to be accepted for and as that other person. Men would not receive Jesus as Jehovah but

despised and rejected Him, therefore He was always a man of sorrows, for by rejecting Him they rejected God.

When a man decides to be a disciple of Christ he has to bear all this in mind, for as surely as no man can live unto himself, neither can any disciple live as of himself. He cannot live in his own name, nor can he promote himself or seek his own glory, but must live in this world in Jesus' name.

Whatever the consequences of that may be, he must not think harshly or accuse anyone if his selflessness is abused. The true follower of Christ understands the reason why men reject him and he brings no accusations against them for it; he knows they do not understand him any more than the Jews understood Jesus Christ. A disciple's glory lies in contentment to be like his Lord, to walk as a son with a father as

Jesus did. To achieve this is sufficient, for it is discipleship, son-ship and sainthood and perfection indeed.

12. With the King in His Kingdom.

Matthew records that the so-called 'sermon on the mount' was spoken to the disciples. This glorious message might as truly be called 'a set piece', for it was when He was set on the mountain that His disciples came unto Him. He took up His position quite deliberately, knowing that what was to follow would most certainly be compared with what Moses did. and said many centuries before. That was an absolutely unforgettable occasion, for it lay at the foundation of the race; those two tablets of stone were the rock of righteousness upon which the nation of Israel was built, and now Jesus sat immovable upon a mountain to deliver the law anew. Both differences and similarities abound in this new presentation of the law of God to men. Each of these is

very important and none more so than the fact that the disciples were not commanded to await Christ's emergence from cloud and fire like some demigod with two tables of stone in His hands, but were called up into His presence as into the presence of a king in His kingdom. Instead of two tablets of stone in Moses' hands they saw two natures, human and divine, blended in one person who expounded to them the nature of the Rock of righteousness upon which they must be built. They listened to the way He handled the old law and marvelled at its newness flowing out of His mouth — 'Moses said' — 'I say unto you' -- He exceeded Moses by far; He went beyond him altogether and set the standard higher, made the punishment of defectors greater and the rewards of obedience richer. There was no mistaking Him, He commenced with

blessing and exhorted them to perfection — 'Blessed are ye — be ye therefore perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect' — nothing less — that is His set position. Praise God they were not worshipping a calf of gold down at the bottom of the mountain, or they might not have heard Him.

Let us particularly notice that He did not say 'be ye perfect as I am perfect', but 'be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect'. That was His own position; right at the beginning He was a disciple Himself and He remained a disciple to the end, learning, following, obeying all the time while walking in fellowship with His Father and God. 'He was led as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb so He opened not His mouth'. What an example of discipleship! He is our Master and Lord and His authority lay in that, although He spoke

to men as to disciples with plenty of faults, He was the Disciple without fault. Our devotion to Him grows partly from our gratitude to Him for being the example He was. So exceedingly great was He and so penetrating His interpretations and applications of God's laws that for ever after none of those early disciples could speak of Moses' law as being other than comparatively weak; they realised that he, with his law, was unable to give life. They saw that in an amazing way whenever Jesus spoke He put His own life into words; the things He said were literally His Spirit and His life. Therefore, except when the occasion demanded, they never spoke of the law of Moses but of the law of Christ. More than that, they said we are to fulfil it in ourselves, so that the things we say and do should be spirit and life to others also.

Let every man know that it is impossible to be in this world among men without our lives affecting others. Whether we are aware of it or not, every man's spirit and life comes out in words and deeds and attitudes in the everyday. John was very aware of this when he said, 'that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you'; although we may not be as explicit as he, or write a book or make any attempt to communicate what we believe to others, we must realise that it is impossible to live and not declare something by living. The Lord knew this and for this reason made disciples and especially apostles, that in them He may exemplify and emphasise what He meant. Mark puts it this way, 'He goeth up into a mountain and calleth unto Him whom He would: and they came unto Him, and He ordained twelve that they should be with Him and that He

might send them forth'. These men had to come to Him and be with Him long before He sent them out to minister. If they were to go and preach and work in His name they had first to live like Him and learn from Him, and for that they had to live with Him. He did not wish their lips to declare one thing and their lives to declare another; consistency is a virtue of God, 'I am the Lord I change not'.

Reading the Gospels we could easily conclude that, despite their many commendable points, if there is one virtue all the disciples lacked it was consistency; led by Judas, they all felt that Mary should not have anointed Jesus with the spikenard and said so; likewise they all vowed they would lay down their lives for the Lord's sake and failed to do so at that time. Disciples should feel that all the world's choicest

possessions and riches as well as all their love and powers should be poured upon Jesus, nor begrudge Him anything, but it seems those men at that time really did not think so. By their words in Simon's house they appeared to be most virtuous, but it may be said entirely without criticism or rancour, that by their actions they revealed that they were far from it. By their words in the guest-chamber also they gave the impression, even the assurance, that they would die with their Lord, but events proved otherwise; they lacked inner consistency; perhaps we all should have been the same had it been us instead of them. Outwardly they may have been adjudged true and faithful followers and could make the claim 'we have left all and followed thee', but inwardly they were moving from very mixed motives indeed, as their question reveals,

'what shall we have therefore?' What a sad ending to such a commendable beginning — they had their eye on rewards rather than on Him.

God is faithful and encourages like faithfulness in all His people by offering rewards for loyalty and endurance. Moses, true leader that he was, endured hardship as seeing Him who is invisible and had respect unto the recompense of the reward: Jesus Himself endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him. God does offer certain incentives to all disciples for patient endurance, but these must not be a man's reason for discipleship lest they be thought by some as wages or even bribes. Should this happen the whole purposes of God thereby would be circumvented and nullified. Discipleship must always be envisaged in John's terms — 'as an only

begotten with a father', and in accordance with Jesus' teaching, 'I am an unprofitable servant'. The man who walks thus will always be impressed with a sense of privilege and duty befitting the honour conferred upon him.

In one of the frequent clashes which occurred between the Lord Jesus and the Pharisees, He so identified Himself with His disciples that they must have rejoiced in heart at what they heard. They were passing through cornfields and as they went they plucked some of the ears of corn, rubbed them in their hands till the grains fell out and then they ate them. They were hungry, but it was the sabbath day and it was considered by the Pharisees that the disciples had broken the law. They were therefore accused of sin and Jesus was also condemned with them because He

condoned their conduct. They must at first have wondered how He would handle the situation, but finally realised that they need not have been over-concerned, for their Champion not only gave the perfect answer to the Pharisees, but also assured their own hearts of His loyalty to them under all circumstances. 'The sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath'. By calling Himself the Son of man He totally identified and allied Himself with His disciples on an issue and at a time when they vitally needed it, and what is more He claimed that the sabbath was made for Him as well as for them and every man. He was Lord of their days and nights as well as of their lives; this Son of man was Lord of everything that was made for man. They who were sons of men were mother and

sister and brother to Him; it was incredible; was this what discipleship meant? It was, and it still means that today.